WORDEATER 58

Joliet Junior College

WORDEATER 58 STAFF: Virginia Fenili, Sandra Kacmarcik, Robin McWilliams, Doug Paul, Patricia Shue, John Stobart, Michelle Ureche

In order to get a selection published in this issue, four of the above had to vote for acceptance.

AWARDS

Ordinarily, WORDEATER awards $25 for prose, $25 for poetry, and $10 each for front and back cover art. Entries for WORDEATER 58 were particularly strong in prose. Consequently, John Stobart decided to make six prose awards of $10 each for this issue. No poetry awards this time.

·PROSE

$10 each to: Ruth Bosard
Mary Dilworth
Sandra Kacmarcik
Penny Sartori
Steve Siedler
Joel Stepanek

·COVERS

$20 to Julie Peterson

Manuscripts or cover designs for WORDEATER 59 must be submitted to John Stobart in room C-1069 by:

FEBRUARY 20, 1987

Manuscripts will not be returned and SHOULD BE TYPED.

NEXT TWO DEADLINES:

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April 17, 1987

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Mary Dilworth

THE VISIT

Beatrice Watson stood barefoot in the doorway of her bedroom squeezing a bottle of shampoo with her fingertips, forcing the green liquid from one end of its plastic tube to the other. She shifted her weight from one leg to the other, causing her ample hips to move up and down underneath the faded, green flannel nightgown that she was wearing like individual earthquakes. She stood there intently watching the closed bathroom door directly across from her bedroom.

Today was her visitation day. Today she would be allowed to visit with her six children as she did on the first and third Mondays of every month. The visits had not been going well lately. Indeed, they had not been going well since the first Monday that they had begun, but especially lately, things just weren't right. The kids looked okay. It was beginning to take Lance, her baby, longer and longer to warm up to her, but he was just a baby and wasn't that to be expected? After all, he was practically an infant when they took him away from her. There had been policemen and policewomen all pulling and prying her arms from around the baby's tiny body. She had refused to give him up, but they had taken him all the same and given her visitation days in his place. Abruptly, the bathroom door swung open and a gray-haired Mr. Watson stepped out. Beatrice quickly pushed past him, throwing him off balance as she rushed into the bathroom.

"Hay gul, what the hell is wrong wit you?" he shouted angrily at the now-closed bathroom door as he sought to regain his balance by holding on to the doorway to Beatrice's bedroom. Inside the bathroom and over the splashing of the water filling the bathtub, Beatrice shouted to her father, "Visitation day!" She could hear him shouting something back but with the noise of the running water and the door being closed, it was difficult to make out his words.

"Fuck it," she muttered as she stepped into the too-small bathtub and began to lower herself into the warm water. Once in the tub, Beatrice instantly lost control of her bladder and urinated freely into the tub as she lay back allowing the warm water to cover as much of her large body as possible. This visitation day would be different, Beatrice thought as she began to rub the bar of soap across her large breasts. She would try real hard, yes very hard to make sure that things went well, and if there were any problems this time, then she, Beatrice, would not be the cause of them. Beatrice smiled broadly, turned sideways in the tiny bathtub and began to work the king-sized bar of deodorant soap down between the soft folds of her huge thighs.

Beatrice exited from the bathroom forty-five minutes later wearing her pink plastic shower cap and clutching a worn, white bath-towel with the words, "Holiday Inn" woven into the center. She entered her own bedroom throwing the towel on to her bed and crossing over to the chest of drawers which stood in

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Madonna Clarke

THE STRANGER

I saw her face
Again in my mirror
A total stranger
Reflected to me.
Does everyone else
Notice her too?
The faraway look
Distant as the stars
The haunted shadows
Chilling my spine
The earthen coolness
Of a mountain glacier.
This dreaded feeling
Devours me, my body
She swallows whole
On the inside
Looking out, will
Anyone notice I'm
No longer here?

****

the corner of the room in order to sort through what few clothing she possessed, looking for something presentable to wear. Since early last week, Beatrice had been dreading the visit. Although she went to them to visit one of her children or another for the past five years, she had never been able to feel comfortable with them or completely at ease. They had no right to take her babies away from her, she thought as she pulled on the panty girdle that she paid $3.00 for at the Red Shield store the day that she and Quinteena Baker had cashed their SSI checks at the currency exchange last Saturday. The girdle was two sizes too small. It had looked much larger when she held it up against her that day in the store. The elastic around the legs cut deeply into her soft, fleshy thighs and as she pulled the top of the girdle all the way over her hips and began to move around the bedroom, she could feel the body of the garment as the elastic in the leg began to roll itself up toward her crotch.

"Gul, if you gonna go visit this moanin, you better put you big ass in motion. Them white folks up there at that place ain't go just sit around and wait on yo big butt all day to git there, you know that!" shouted old-man Watson as he passed by Beatrice's room on his way back to the bathroom. Beatrice looked up from dusting herself with the talc only to see her father close the bathroom door.

"Old bastard," she muttered again pushing her index finger through a hole in her best black dress. This dress would do, she decided stepping into the garment and grabbing around the back of it to catch the zipper.

"You go eat fo you go, Bea?" Beatrice's mother asked as Beatrice entered the tiny warm kitchen pulling at the leg of the girdle which by then had rolled itself up neatly between her thighs.

"Naw, Mamma, I'm late already, and I was gon stop an pick up Lance some candy to take wit me to the visit. It sho is a damn shame, other womens has they kids and they's worse then me and I can't have mines!"

"Now, Bea," Mrs. Watson said putting the mug of coffee that she was drinking down on the small kitchen table.

"Don't you go up there raising hell wit them white folks. You know they don got tired of you goin up there actin like a fool all the time."

"You don't know what the shit you talking about, Mamma!" Beatrice said putting on her best black coat with the three buttons missing and snatching up a rumpled brown paper shopping bag.

Beatrice exited from the back door of the kitchen and walked out into the alley that ran along behind the house. The dread she had begun to feel over the past few days had now blossomed into a bright, shiny fear which caused little beads of perspiration to pop out on her forehead and dribble down her face, making wet tracks through her excessively applied make-up and face powder. Had Beatrice not been a product of the public school system's apathetic approach to emotionally disturbed learning disabled children, she would have been able to recognize the fear and give name to it, and perhaps, keep it contained within her subconscious from which it had sprung. The fear was termination, termination of her parental rights. But not having been taught the coping skill she so desperately needed, Beatrice chose to let the fear precede her, shining brightly to announce her arrival whenever she went to a visit.

At 8:45 a.m., Prentiss Smith moved the beige telephone from her desk blotter and stared hard at the day's appointments. She felt her scalp begin to tingle as she looked at the schedule for the twentieth time since taking her coat off and sitting down at her large, neat, everything-in-its-place desk just fifteen minutes before. There was no mistake. Today was the day. Beatrice Watson's visit was scheduled for today. How one single client could intimidate her so much, she just didn't know, she thought. In reality, she did know. She knew that she didn't like Beatrice; she didn't like Beatrice because she was loud, large, and often funky, though not so much now than before, thank goodness. The worst part about the whole business was that the woman just frightened her . . . Prentiss shuddered, stood up from her desk and went to the employee lounge to smoke the first of several cigarettes until Beatrice Watson's visit was completed. Beatrice arrived at the Child Welfare office eighteen minutes late for her visit. She

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had had to walk the entire distance of about a mile from her own house because she had not been lucky enough to run into someone willing to give her a lift as she had originally thought. Her agitation over being late and the fear of the worst had caused her to perspire profusely and she walked into the office with her coat flying open, her hair now standing straight up on top of her head and one heel of her run-over shoes now broken. She was puffing, and out of breath, as she went up to the reception desk where a previously bored receptionist sat, and blurted out, "I'm Bea, and I come to visit my kids."

The receptionist hurriedly rang for Prentiss Smith who, everyone knew by now, had been assigned exclusively to Beatrice. The receptionist also knew that Beatrice's kids would be late arriving. The case aide who was in charge of transporting the children had just called to tell someone that she had a flat tire on the way, but that was Prentiss Smith's problem. Let Ms. Smith give the maniac the news.

"Ms. Smith will be with you in a moment. Please have a seat," the receptionist said politely hoping that Beatrice didn't find a seat too close to her desk.

"I ton't want no damn seat. I wants to see my kids!" Beatrice shouted at the receptionist. What the receptionist didn't know was that after having walked so far, the rolls of elastic between Beatrice's legs had begun to cut off the circulation of blood to her thighs. She was freezing from the top of her thighs down to her hoes, and she knew instinctively that sitting down could only cause her excruciating pain.

Prentiss Smith crushed out the cigarette, her fourth, and walked out of the employee john with a confidence she did not feel. They had been calling her for fifteen minutes to come and deal with that maniac in the visiting room, and each time they called, it took her longer and longer to get ready to face the string of profanity and insults that Beatrice would surely hurl at her as she did her best to placate the woman. What was the use of the visits anyway, she thought as she walked down the hallway toward the visiting area. The case was on the court docket for termination of her parental rights. It was just taking the damn lawyers so long to make up their minds about what really constituted abuse that the kids, having been in foster care practically since birth, had long-since forgotten who their real mother actually was. They were all terrified of Beatrice as it was, and having to witness the woman's hysterical performances at each visit did little to endear her to them. A real tragedy, she thought, and stepped into the visiting area.

"Miss Prentiss Smith!" shouted Beatrice when she saw the social worker. "Where is my God-damned kids at?" It wasn't so much the question that Beatrice asked her that made Prentiss Smith take one step backwards as it was the <u>way</u> that she asked her. Beatrice looked a mess. Not only did her short black hair stand straight up on her head in a sort of wild cut, but whatever she had been carrying in the rumpled shopping bag had come apart, and there were large, dark-brown, wet spots all over the bag. She swung it to and fro in her hand using it to punctuate every word she said. God only knew what was in it.

"Your children are on their way," she said, trying to keep her voice as normal as possible and fighting to keep the scream from forcing its way to her lips.

"I knew it! I knew it!" Beatrice wailed, advancing further towards Prentiss Smith who, once again, took one step backwards.

"You all ain't had no damn business taking my kids way from me in the first damn place! It's plenty a womens who bruises they kids worst then me and you all ain't . . . "

At that moment a sharp cramp exploded down Beatrice's left thigh, causing her to double over in pain. She dropped the shopping bag she had been swinging at the social worker and began reaching up the front of her dress in an attempt to unroll the impossibly fused leg from the panty girdle. An instant later, Beatrice's right leg gave way to the pressure of the elastic and she went down on both knees, still clawing insanely at the panty girdle.

"My God!" Prentiss Smith gasped stepping quickly away from Beatrice. "Call the D. M. H. police!" Prentiss shouted at the horrified receptionist who obeyed instantly. The door of the Child Welfare office opened once more and this time a tired, hassled-looking case aide ushered in six small children of various ages. The children stared wide-eyed at the wild woman on the floor on her knees with her dress up

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over her head and her hands pulling and digging at some unseen object far up in the crevices of her huge thighs and clung tightly to one another.

"Miss Watson!" shouted Prentiss Smith, now feeling in control of the situation for the first time.

"We'll have to terminate your visit and set it up for . . ."

"Terrmate!" Beatrice screamed out the word and instantly became hysterical. The fear was out, dancing and shining brightly. The word had been said and she, Beatrice, had not been the one to say it first. It had been said to her. Beatrice groped for her children who by this time had fused themselves into one tight human knot. They edged slowly away from her.

"Terrmate!" she continued to scream as she got to her feet and staggered toward Prentiss Smith, who had begun to press herself flat against the bare wall of the visiting area.

In an instant, but more like an eternity to Prentiss, the D. M. H. police had arrived, and went straight to Beatrice, who could not stop screaming the word. "Terrmate." Beatrice was forcefully removed once again from the visiting area, this time the tears streamed down her face unchecked as she kept screaming, "Terrmate" at the top of her lungs.

After the commotion and after Prentiss Smith had dismissed the case aide along with Beatrice's children, she made her way back down the hallway to her neat, everything-in-its-place desk and began setting up the schedule for Beatrice's next visit--two weeks from that coming Monday.

****

Laura Boron

SUCCESS

Attempt, attempt.
Success?
Result, failure.
Frustration.

Attempt, attempt.
Success?
Result, failure.
Frustration.

Solution.

Attempt, attempt.
Success?
Result, failure.
Disregard.

Success.

****

Steve Black

PAINTED BLISS

Said a man to a pretty young miss,
"Could I possibly have a kiss?"
She said, "You know the score,
It'll be five bucks more,
And don't smudge my painted bliss."

****

Steve Siedler

PATIENCE, MY PET

A courageous captain,
A master of men
Wins a battle once
Then fights it again
All for the sake of humanity
Or--
More like a master of insanity
he strives to derive instant solutions,
To a problem compounded by
countless dilutions of saline,
To rub into the wounds of the captives,
A caustic conversion changes the champ,
To a moldy, festering official stamp of
authority,
A symbol of superiority for a slave.
He grumbles, then grovels in a grave of
what once was dignity.
A diversion of titles and faces and such,
Really doesn't alter the monster much.
And so we wait
And are occasionally slapped back into line
Until it is our turn to become the appetizer

****

Ruth Bosard

UP AND DOWN

Up

flying

ever so higher

taken by the wind

now descending

falling

down

now

dead

on

the

ground . . . . .

****

Madonna Clarke

JUSTIFICATIONS

I apologize . . .
Please forgive me . . .
I didn't mean . . .
I really regret . . .
I take back everything . . .
You have my deepest regrets . . .
Look, that's not what I meant . . .
This isn't very easy . . .
It's just that . . .
You know what . . .
Let me see . . .
I'm sorry . . .

****

Doug Paul

SHE LIVES ON LOVE STREET

She has bells and monkeys
and beaded doorways
She plays dulcimer by moonlight
She's been to Shangri-La

She has pots of plants and plants of pot
take your pick she's got it all
she'll give herself to you but not for
very long

She likes to go to the head shop
with Cassie, Mick and Paul
the people like to watch her
Neighborhood people know

She won't let you down
she'll keep you for tea
you know where she lives
down on Love Street

****

Judy Belfield

CONFETTI LOVE

Confetti love
scooped from the street:
a hundred tiny pieces
tossed in the air,
a dozen colors
repeated a dozen times--
technicolor snowstorm
floating slow motion
as last-word Rosebud longing
for a simple time
fills with complex parting-agony.
So much falls back to earth
never having touched--
even slightly;
is caught by gutter drafts
and dragged for miles,
the pieces shredded,
ground into perfume
dabbed on the pulse points
of despair.

****

Sandra Kacmarcik

FELLINI, EAT YOUR HEART OUT

When Ann awoke that Halloween mornin in 1974, she did not realize it would be a Fellini day. She simply knew she was not looking forward to the commitment she had made.

A Fellini day was Ann's way of describing a feeling of being caught up in a surrealistic movie. As a transplanted Yankee to the small, rural town of Lumberwood, Located in an isolated area deep in south Georgia, Ann had experienced a number of Fellini days during the past two years. She found that it was not uncommon for her to see as bizarre those things which the local people accepted as perfectly reasonable behavior and a normal way of life.

On this particular morning, Ann busied herself in the kitchen. She had cookies to bake and a costume to assemble. She had promised to help with the Halloween party at Hartman House.

The Hartman House was an oddity in itself. It was a nursing home owned and operated by the Hartman family, but highly subsidized by the government. Not only was it a residence for elderly patients, but it was a dropoff point for some of the most severely physically and mentally handicapped children in the state.

Strange, Ann thought, that she had been invited to two parties for the same day, neither of which she really wanted to attend. In addition to the Halloween party for the children of Hartman House, her dear friend Libby had planned a doggie birthday party.

Libby was one of the first people Ann had met after arriving in Lumberwood. They had become instant friends. In fact, Ann had been with Libby a year earlier when the two had stopped at the Walton family's farm to view a new litter of basset hound puppies and reserve one for Libby's son and daughter for Christmas.

The party did seem a clever idea. Libby had invited her friends, their dogs, and an assortment of children to celebrate Hush Puppy's first birthday.

"Ann, y'all must come," Libby had prompted when she had called earlier that week. "Bring Scamper. It will be so much fun."

"Libby, I really can't. I promised I would help out at Hartman House on Friday. Besides, you know my dog isn't party trained."

They both had a big laugh, but the truth was that Scamper wasn't really trained. period. He was a dog. He didn't live in the house like everyone else's. He wasn't pure bred, nor was he manicured or clipped. His toenails weren't painted, and he didn't wear little bows in his hair. This was the only time Ann had been happy to decline an invitation from Libby, who was the epitome of a gracious southern lady, and as Dr. Montgomery's wife, a member of the highest social circle in the community.

"Too bad," Ann thought, "that my excuse had to be Hartman House." She really did want to help those poor forgotten people, but she simply did not have the stomach for it. She had seen children at Hartman House who looked barely human. They reminded her of the people she had gawked at many decades earlier when she was a child and the annual circus came to town. There was always a sideshow of curiosities being hawked by an announcer with a rich baritone voice. "Step right up, ladies and gentlemen. Inside this tent, we have the world's only living alligator boy—half human, half reptile. For just two quarters, one-half of a dollar, ladies and gentlemen, you can view . . . "

Actually, many of the children at Hartman House would have been circus freaks if they had been born a few decades earlier. There was one child at the home who was truly an alligator boy. He was covered with big red welts that looked very much like scales. He had a large head, short neck, popped eyes. He could not speak except for squeaks and grunts, and his hands and feet were webbed. Ann had no idea how old he was, but he was small; and he waddled through the halls, his strange eyes exploring everyone. He was simply accepted. No one seemed to know what kind of brain was locked inside the distorted head.

Ann also remembered how, on her first visit, she had talked at length to one girl in her late teens whose body was so severely deformed she was bedridden. The young woman was twisted and curled into a fetal position between spotlessly white sheets.

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Her hospital bed had been placed beside a window overlooking a small flower garden. Although there was no response, Ann talked about what a nice view the girl had, how pretty the little garden was, and did she see the beautiful yellow butterfly flitting from flower to flower? How utterly sick Ann had felt when she later learned this young woman was also blind.

Of course, Ann knew it was only the educable children from Hartman House who would be attending the Halloween party. There would be Jimmy, a rather normal-looking boy of low intelligence who always wore a football helmet. He was prone to seizures, and he wore it for protection. The two Wilson brothers, Rob and Will, would surely be there. They both suffered from Mongolism. Then, poor Mary flashed into Ann's mind. Mary was an exception in that she had normal intelligence. She simply had no legs, not even stubs. She looked like a big black stump. What she lacked in legs, however, she made up for in powerful shoulders and arms which were developed like a weightlifter's.

Mary should have been in public school, but the children from Hartman's were not considered a part of the community; they were outsiders and the townspeople intended to keep it that way. It was through the efforts of Sister Susan, a Roman Catholic nun who had been sent by the Glenmarians to work in the home mission, that a classroom was created and the Hartman students taught to the extent of their abilities.

Although Sister Susan had insisted that Ann's presence at the party was vital, Ann had the decided feeling that her being there was more for her own edification than for the good of the children. "Sister was sneaky that way," she thought as she drove across town.

Ann entered the home dressed as a fairy godmother. She walked down the corridor carrying a wand and a basket of cookies. She was pleasantly surprised by all the Halloween decorations. There were big jack-o-lanterns lining the wall, corn shocks standing in the corners, and cut-outs of black bats and black cats hanging from strings attached to the ceiling lights.

The first person she recognized was Billy. She had forgotten about him. He was both retarded and crippled, and she had not seen him out of his wheelchair. Billy was a green snake, and he came wiggling down the hall on his stomach making sort of a hissing sound, which he often did anyway. A forced smile froze on Ann's face, a smile she would hold for the next three hours.

Just outside the door of the large meeting room sat a gremlin, all scrunched down in a chair with her toes pointed inward. Ann thought it was Emily, an aide, but she couldn't be sure. Emily had an IQ not much higher than many of the children, and certainly lower than Mary's. The gremlin would not talk; she just kept bobbing her head. She was actually spooky.

As Ann entered the festive room, she saw Mary rolling toward her in a wheelchair.

"Hey, look at me. I am a scarecrow. See my legs? I have legs," she laughed. With that she picked up one of the pants' legs filled with straw and gave it a vigorous shake. "Do I scare you?"

"With a beautiful smile like yours, you could never scare anyone," Ann shot back. At times, she even surprised herself. She was amazed she could keep such a placid exterior when her insides were crying.

As she looked again around the room, she saw skeletons, ghosts, monsters. "When normal people make themselves up to look grotesque, somehow it seems funny," she thought to herself. "But when truly grotesque forms try to make themselves even more frightening looking, it seems an absurdity." The muscles in her face were beginning to hurt from the fixed smile. How she wished she, too, had worn a Halloween mask.

Just then a huge witch entered the room riding a broom, carrying a large shopping bag and screeching at the top of her lungs, "Heh! Heh! Heh!"

All the students began to squeal. The witch galloped around the room on her broom shrieking all the louder, "I am the wicked witch, and I am going to eat you all."

Some of the students seemed genuinely frightened. Then, Jimmy, who was dressed as a football player to match the helmet he always wore, pointed to the witch's shoes. Next, everyone began pointing at the witch's shoes. It was Sister Susan—they all recognized her sandals. The room was filled with laughter and cheers as Sister opened her bag and began to toss candy into the air. Wheelchairs banged, kids slid on their stomachs, others scooted on their fannies, but somehow all the candy was

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collected.

Later, when everyone had settled down and was dining on punch and cookies, Ann noticed the older Wilson boy was missing. She walked into the hall and saw him stretched out on the couch near the entrance of the building. He was dressed as a monster, and at fourteen and overweight, he was nearly man-size. The monster had a bucket on the floor near his head. He was moaning and gagging. His body was twitching, and mucous was running from the corners of his mouth. The pigeon-toed gremlin was standing nearby, but seemed to be ignoring the whole scene.

"Shouldn't we get help?" Ann asked. This time the gremlin answered, "No, ma'am, he's okay. He always acts like this when he gets excited."

Just then, Sister Susan came bouncing out of her small office with a handful of strings attached to a colorful bouquet of helium-filled balloons. She danced over to Ann.

"Looks like Rob has had a little too much excitement," she said as she bent down and tied a big red balloon to the handle of the pail. Then she skipped on down the hall and into the party room.

Ann was exhausted when it was finally over. She was thanked abundantly for coming and for the tasty cookies. As she drove away, she did have to laugh to herself about Sister Susan's witch outfit. It was quite obvious to Ann that the black dress and black cape were remnants of a nun's habit. "Probably packed away at some earlier date, when the order began wearing street clothing," Ann speculated.

Instead of stopping by Libby's as Ann had promised, she went directly home. She took a leisurely bath and slipped into a terry robe. Ann sat down on her bed and picked up the phone from the nightstand and gave Libby a quick call to see how the birthday party went.

When no one answered immediately, Ann let the phone continue to ring. She knew there were two outdoor phones, one on the patio, and the other poolside. Finally, a very strained voice answered, "Hey." Everyone in rural Georgia used "hey" as a salutation.

"Hello, hello," Ann replied. She knew it wasn't Libby's voice. It sounded like Jenelda, the beautiful but high-strung wife of the owner of the largest lumber mill in south Georgia, and Libby's close friend.

"Jenelda, Jenelda, is that you?"

"Yes," the shaky voice responded.

"What on earth is wrong?"

"Oh, it is just terrible. I have a migraine. The whole party was ruined." On and on she went--something about Buzzard and Mr. Peepers and the kids. She wasn't making much sense.

Ann knew Mr. Peepers only too well. That was Jenelda's dog, and probably the most neurotic dog she had ever met. At least, he was the only dog she had ever known that was in analysis. He was a skinny grey toy poodle that shook constantly, jumped up and down in one spot, and yipped incessantly. He wasn't even half the size of Hush Puppy. Buzzard, on the other hand, was larger than Hush Puppy. He was her brother, from the same litter, in fact. That was the only reason why he and his mistress, Jane, had been invited.

"Now, calm down, Jenelda, and tell me exactly what happened," said Ann.

"Buzzard simply ruined everything. Libby went to so much trouble planning and decorating. She had a separate bowl for each dog with his name painted on it and cute little paper hats for the dogs to wear. Well, Buzzard refused to wear his hat, and then he went from bowl to bowl gobbling up all the treats. He wouldn't play any of the games, and when it came time to give out little prizes to the dogs who won, Buzzard ran up and snatched the prizes right out of Libby's hand. That's when all the kids got involved and tried to chase down Buzzard. The other dogs joined in, and they all knocked over tables and tore up paper plates and paper tablecloths. Some of the nannies are still trying to collect the kids, and the yard is filled with nannies, dogs, and kids, all chasing around after each other. I am just sick."

"It sounds rather hectic to me, Jenelda, but it doesn't sound all that catastrophic."

"That's not all, Ann."

"There's more?"

"Yes. Poor Mr. Peepers is sitting in the Mercedes and refuses to come out. His little heart is broken."

"What happened to poor Mr. Peepers,

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Jenelda?"

"Y'all know how protective he is of Hush Puppy. Well, Buzzard just keeps thumping her all over the yard," Jenelda wailed.

"Thumping?"

"Yes, thumping her."

"Thumping?" Ann repeated. "Thumping? Hummm . . . oh, thumping. That ought to set Mr. Peepers back about six months."

"Yes." By now Jenelda was sobbing. "And just when he was doing so well, too."

Jane should have had the good sense to go home."

"You're right," Jenelda said. "I think I will just take a Valium and go sit in the car with Mr. Peepers until they leave."

"You do that, Jenelda, and tell Libby I'll call her tomorrow. Bye."

Ann fell back on her bed and closed her eyes. "Frederico Fellini," she muttered, "where are you? I know you are here somewhere. Roll the cameras." She could hear the calliope playing. She could see the merry-go-round starting to spin. The mirrors and colored lights began to flash. Around they went--wooden horses bedecked with bright jewels and ridden by pretty kids, ugly kids, goblins and monsters, dogs running round and round barking, Sister Susan flying overhead on her broom, and Jenelda someplace out in the dark crying, "Mr. Peepers, Mr. Peepers." Thoroughly exhausted, Ann fell into a fitful sleep.

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Steve Siedler

T-BONE, MEDIUM RARE

Chris Taylor was a nice guy. We roomed together the semester I attended ISU. A lot of people thought that was a little strange, because Chris was a 6'8", 280 lb. black man, and I was a little white guy. I guess we really didn't have that much in common, except drinking beer, beer and jazz.

Chris played a baritone saxophone, which is fairly close to a bass trombone when it comes to playing a balls horn. We called them balls horns because the notes didn't come from the gut, they came from a little bit lower. I played lead bone, trombone. I was the screamer. Chris used to laugh at me because after a night of tunes, I'd spit blood from pressing so hard to hit the high ones. He used to giggle, if you can imagine a 6'8", 280 lb. black man giggling, and say, "You better watch it, little white man, or you're gonna have to gum your food to death."

"Yeah," I'd retort, "and you keep sittin' on those low ones like that and people are gonna think you filled your drawers."

We lived off campus in a house that was occupied by members of the ISU jazz band. That explained our impromptu jam sessions at three a.m. It was just a big rotting house that was home for a bunch of idiots whose main purpose in life at that time was to play with things with their lips and fingers. Some of those things were even capable of producing music. A lot of people complained about our pre-dawn serenades, but, as John, the bass bone player stated quite eloquently, "Fuck 'em." John was tall and lanky, had a fuzzy little beard and wore John Lennon glasses. He could belch louder than anyone I had ever heard before, and when John said, "Fuck 'em," no one disagreed.

Anyway, on a Monday morning sometime in mid-April, Jerry, our director, entered our little rehearsal room with an announcement. It was a little difficult for him to get the message across with twenty-odd, no pun intended, people hooting and tooting and twanging and banging on various objects. Jerry flung a chalk eraser at Joey, the saxophonist that nobody liked anyway, and screamed, "Shut up!" Jerry was tomato-red above the shoulders, which usually meant that he was excited about something. Jerry was also bald, which emphasized the tomato look to an almost ludicrous degree, but this was Jerry.

"People, shut up! Does anyone want to

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go to Florida or not?"

Instant silence.

"We've been accepted; we've got hotel accomodations. We've got transportation, and we've got tickets to Severinson, Buddy Rich, and Woody Herman. We've also got an hour's worth of stuff to put together. Now, if anybody can't go, I need to know now."

The band had been planning to go for months. Jerry sent in a demo tape and we were cocky as hell that they would want us. We had begged, borrowed, and well, done other things to assure that the financial aspect was no problem. I was going, even if I had to go alone. No, Jerry would go, and so would Chris. B. B. John would hitch if he had to, and Oscar would be there. I haven't mentioned Oscar yet. Oscar could have crawled out of a sewer, covered with excrement, unshaven, hung over, and reeking of who-knows-what, and still pick up girls. Oscar played the congas, spoke Spanish, and looked a lot like Erik Estrada. He could eat garlic and still convince girls to buy him drinks. Oscar was a good man to be around in bars.

A lot of the guys hung out in bars. It was a good way to pick up a few extra bucks. No one really checked union cards, and even sitting in for a set or two for free was kicks. Of course, getting paid was much more fun. It was settled. Everyone was going.

Jerry informed us of the various aspects of the major jazz festival.

"Nothing will be on time. The rooms will be small. We won't sleep much, and you guys had better stay sober enough to play. One more thing, if anybody gets in serious trouble, I'm leaving you there. Get the message?"

Jerry went on to announce the six tunes we would play to fill up our allotted hour of performance time. The first five were no problem, three cookers, a laid-back Quincy tune, and a blues tune called, "All Jammed Out." The sixth song title blew my little ship right out of the water.

The song was called "Alone." It was a jazz ballad with a lead bone solo that lasted almost the entire length of the song. Playing notes was no problem, but they were supposed to say something. The song was supposed to be an emotional outpour by a lone guy with a T-bone. The band had the song down, but evidently my emotions weren't in an out-pouring mood, because it never sounded quite right.

Jerry knew it. I had the feeling I was being tested.

"Alone" was full of goose-bump chords, the kind that blend just right to produce a body rush, with tingling finger tips and blood rushing to your head. I loved those chords, but above them, somewhere in the stratosphere, was supposed to be, singing a love song with a horn, and I just didn't happen to be in love at the moment.

Rehearsals for the next two weeks were hectic. All of the songs were getting better. I was even beginning to loosen up a bit. Oscar kept introducing me to girls, hoping I would be inspired.

"Hell, man, it always works, you meet a girl who sizzles and your troubles are over." He snapped his fingers for effect.

"Oscar, this is a ballad, man, a love song, not bumps and grinds with an easy date."

"You're crazy, man. You better do something. I'm tellin' you, I'll set you up with Linda's roommate. Love, lust, what's the difference as long as you play the damn song?"

"I"ll let you know, Oscar."

Before I could let Oscar know anything, we were loading a Trailways bus at 7:00 a.m. One guy took charge, six helped, and the rest of us just stood around. I wasn't a person yet, and had no intention of becoming one for several more hours. I boarded the bus and flopped into a seat fairly close to the rear, but far enough from the back to avoid being offended by the bus toilet.

We were set, and soon, except for the excited jabber of excited morning people, a steady Hmmm was the dominating sound. I zonked almost immediately, and didn't regain consciousness until somewhere in Tennessee.

Tennessee was our scheduled stop for consumption of burnt burgers and flat Pepsi. Boring food for a boring ride, appropriate somehow. We ate on the road. Not literally, of course, but we ate while the bus was moving. Some of the guys were passing around photos of their past, present, or imagined girlfriends. I'm sure it is no secret, but yes, ladies, most guys do kiss and tell during a group bull-session. If there is nothing to tell, most guys will also lie, but I'm sure some women do the same thing. I

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was bored, so I went back to sit with Chris and John at the back of the bus Chris had smuggled a quart of brandy aboard, and getting lit had to be more fun than listening to a bunch of guys lie about their sex lives.

A couple more hours passed. It was beginning to get a little dark. I was beginning to get a little drunk. Everyone was getting restless except John, Chris, and me. We were fine.

"Did I ever tell you guys I was arrested once?" I asked. Nobody answered.

"My brother used to camp by the lake near our house. One night, he mixed up a gallon of screwdrivers and talked me into going with him. There was this little canoe. It was just sitting there."

"What was it doing?"

"It was just sitting there, so we decided to take a little cruise. There was only one paddle, and I gave that to my brother, cause I didn't want to do a damn thing but sit there. So, he paddles out to about the middle of the lake, and then just kinda lets go of the damn thing."

"That was pretty stupid," Chris added.

"That's what I said. You know those paddles are supposed to float, but it was so damn dark out there we couldn't see anything anyway."

"So what did you do?" John queried.

"We floated around drinking screwdrivers all night long."

"You guys are lucky you didn't tip the canoe," said Chris.

"They had to come out in the morning and tow us to shore."

"They arrested you for that?" John looked shocked.

"Yeah, handcuffs, the works. The owner dropped charges because the cop at the station convinced him we couldn't possibly be stealing his canoe when we were stuck in the middle of a lake with no paddle. We had to buy him a new paddle though."

John belched, pronouncing, "fuck you" quite clearly through the noise. A card game had started up front and John went to join in. Chris and I grinned at each other until I went out, dozing restlessly throughout the night. The constant hum of the engine annoyed me.

The bus pulled into a truck stop around dawn for breakfast. Sometime during the night they had changed drivers. This one looked a little like an elf. Twenty-three scraggly-looking guys zombied our way in to eat. We were definitely suffering from bus lag. Even Oscar's timing was off. He tried to flirt with a waitress and spilled orange juice all over his shirt. That was the highlight of the morning until someone told us we were in Florida.

Whoop-de-do! Sun, sand, ocean, girls, truck stops with palm trees, yes indeed, sunny Florida. As we boarded the bus, it began to rain. That cheered us up.

Sunlight had begun to filter through the grey by the time we reached our hotel. It wasn't a palace, but it wasn't bad. We checked in, then began to unload. Four guys to a room. We had a short hallway all to ourselves and after changing, our clothes I mean, we ran down to the pool. It was imperative that, being in Florida, we jumped in some kind of water as quickly as possible. Chris said he'd be back shortly, so I dove in and swam across the pool. I climbed out and flopped into a pool-side chair. There, I've been swimming in Florida, I thought. Now I can look at girls. There were no girls at the pool, only the same sweaty guys that had been on the bus. Maybe it was just too early. A horrible thought crossed my mind--what if there weren't any girls at this hotel?

Chris came lumbering over shortly. He was carrying a gallon of orange juice, some plastic cups, and a bucket of ice.

"Are you trying to get healthy all of a sudden?" I asked.

"No. This is your brother's recipe. I thought it would go along with the water."

"You, young man, were right."

Chris looked around. "Where all the girls at? This place is supposed to be packed with 'em."

Jerry came down to the pool to make his little speech. "Okay. We're here. We're not going to be here long, and we're on a really tight schedule." He began passing out copies. "I want you guys where you're supposed to be, when you're supposed to be there."

Chris looked over the schedule. "Shit, Jerry, the only free time this thing gives us is Friday night, and we're leaving Saturday."

"I know," Jerry said apologetically,

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"festival rules."

Grumble, grumble.

Except those first few hours, we didn't get much free time. Despite bus lag, we had rehearsal, dinner, and then it was off to hear Doc wail. Don't get me wrong, the guy was good, but he was with his road band. Trumpet solo after trumpet solo got repetitious. The trumpet section loved it, though.

A midnight swim and it was lights out.

The day we wasted, half sightseeing, and the other half at Sea World. Fish are fish. After dinner Oscar and I went to the hotel club. The band let us sit in for a while and the drinks were free. It wasn'too bad.

Day three was early rehearsal, and then we spent time with Mickey and Goofy in Walter's weird fantasyland, at least officailly. Unofficially, Chris and I took a cab to Hertz, rented a car and cruised to the beach. We downed a few cold ones with some musicians from Michigan. They couldn't handle a whole day of Mickey either. A little while, fine, but a whole day was ridiculous.

Our schedule told us it was getting late. I made a date to meet a girl named Lori by the pool at midnight, after Mr. Rich. Then we returned the car and took a cab back to catch the bus for the hotel. A quick shower, and we were off to see Buddy, who may not be the best drummer in the world. That night, he was definitely the loudest. I left the concert with a headache, but still looking forward to seeing Lori at the pool. On the bus, the band took a vote. I lost. We went out for pizza. It was after one when we returned to the hotel, and there was definitely no one at the pool. Shit.

Back in the room, Chris cracked a bottle of brandy and passed it over.

"Here, take your mind off it."

"Yeah. Is this trip fucked up or what?"

"Yeah." He paused. "Speakin' of fucked up, how's that solo comin' along?"

"It isn't."

"What's the problem?"

"I don't know." I took a big swallow of brandy.

"Steve, have you ever been in love?" Chris asked.

"Yeah, a long time ago."

"Doesn't matter. Remember how it felt? Pretty damn good, right?"

"Yeah, so what's your point?"

"Remember, sometimes, the two of you would be alone, and you felt like you had to tell her how much she meant to you or something inside was going to explode?"

"Yeah, everytime I tried to explain it, the words came out like corny lines from old movies."

"That's my point." Chris raised his index finger. "I've heard you, and you play that horn a hell of a lot better than you talk."

"Yeah, but that's been over for a long time."

"Shit, man, don't play to the girl, play the feeling, and it will come across. And I'll bet somewhere out there there's a girl that'll catch the message and give it right back to you full force."

"You think so?"

"Bet you a dollar. Now pass me back that bottle before it's empty."

I went to sleep thinking about what Chris had said.

I woke up the next morning thinking about what Chris had said. We rehearsed early,and things went better, but something was still missing. Woody Herman was an early concert, so we rushed, and it was worth it. That day, Mr. Herman's band could have blown the doors off of any band in the country. Every musician he had did something special, and they did it with such apparent ease. They were having fun, and I was mesmerized. Woody ended by saying, "I know I'll be seeing some of you out there around." He could see the dreams, realistic or not, that were floating around in that audience of musicians. He knew the head rush of applause. Woody had it down. He was the Man.

After dinner, everybody went to the club This was our last night here. The college competition had been going on all week, and tomorrow was our shot. Then it was ISU bound

Around eleven, I left the club. I bought a bottle of spumante, and took the elevator up to our room. The floor seemed deserted, except for a guy running around like an idiot because he had a girl in his room and couldn't find anyplace to buy a condom. I went into the room, locked the

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door, and opened the spumante. I was still thinking about what Chris had said the night before. I took out my bone, turned off the lights, grabbed the wine, and went out on the terrace. I drank a little wine, then a little more. I raised the horn to my lips, closed my eyes, and began to play.

I wasn't sure what was coming out, but it felt right. After about a half hour, I stopped to drink a little more wine. Eight floors down, someone out of the darkness yelled, "Thank you!" and a single pair of hands began to slowly clap. I smiled and went to bed.

The next morning was hustle time. We had to eat breakfast, shower, dress, check out, load the luggage and instruments. Then we were whisked away to the waiting room, where, you guessed it, we waited. John began to sing a song that went something like "Daddy hated music, so mama found a feller and they danced and they sang all night."

We went into the warm-up room to fiddle around and tell stupid jokes to work off the nervous tension. We ran through some trouble spots quickly then Jerry told us to warm up on our own and try to relax. Chris talked to Jerry for a little while, then walked over to me and asked, "How's shit?"

"I'll take a shot."

"Good enough." He glanced back at Jerry and nodded.

We were on stage. The curtain was down. "And now, the band from SIU."

John belched and said, "ISU, asshole!" Even Jerry laughed, then picked up the microphone and made the correction. Jerry had that tomato look about him.

Jerry counted us off. We took off. The first number was a little too tight. The audience applauded anyway. The Quincy tune was so laid back we should have been playing while sitting in recliners. The third tune was quick to begin with, but Jerry twisted the tempo dial another quarter turn. Our eyes bulged and we hung on for our lives. The crowd loved it. "All Jammed Out," the blues tune, had a tenor sax solo. Tenor saxes could out-blues any other wind instrument in existence today. The fifth tune was quick and easy, just as it was written.

It was party time. The lights went down a little lower. I stood up and turned on the microphone. A spot came on, and my eyes had to adjust. I nodded to Jerry.

The song started with a cadenza. I took my time with it. After this was my message. I nodded to Jerry again, and the bass and percussion laid down the rhythm. There they were. My goose bump chords. God, I loved those chords. I had the rest of the chords memorized, so I closed my eyes, raised my horn, and came in after eight.

The spotlight was in my eyes, but they they were closed, so I could see perfectly. I started softly, the chords crescendoed and decrescendoed like waves bringing me to shore. Slowly, softly, I danced my way in, a little unsure, a little shy, but trusting. I was alone on the terrace again, with a gulf breeze blowing gently through my hair, and a bottle of spumante sitting in a chair. I soared. I dipped. I came on strong only to ease away a little. I had fun. I hit a couple of high notes that I had never tried in public before, then continued with a clever, quick progression just to keep them thinking.

I eased in and out, supported by my chords. I was alone with the horn, but not really. I was reaching out, making love to that unknown girl who would catch the message and give it right back full force. I didn't need words this time. The horn was the newly-discovered organ that gave me the ability to sing a message that my words had made seem hollow.

I played a teasing slap, a playful smile. I lip slurred a game of strip backgammon by a crackling fire, then eased into a slow dance with no one else on the floor. The chords changed, and the volume dropped, telling me the message had to end. I played rhythmically frenzied cadenza, then highlighted the final chord with a note in the stratosphere, adding a little vibrato at the end.

I wasn't sure how well I had played, but the title of the tune was "Alone," and it was my message. If no one else liked it, or understood it, tough. The crowd was applauding, but hell, they always do that. Oscar was smiling. Jerry had become a grinning tomato. John leaned over and said, "Turn your microphone off, asshole."

Chris turned around, smiled, then nodded. He didn't have to say anything.

I had a salty taste in my mouth, and spit out a little blood, then a little more. My teeth hurt like hell, but I guess I had finally

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gotten it right, and damn it, blood or
no blood, it felt great. It tasted just
like a T-bone, medium-rare.

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Doug Paul

DANCE ON FIRE

Just because we're supposed to be
it doesn't mean we are and just because
we disagree it doesn't mean we can't go
far.
Suppose I knew you long ago even
though I
didn't. It doesn't mean I've never
loved or
wished upon a star

We play the game, we dance on fire
We run rhough the past with our hearts
at our feet
and we just can't make it last

Even though I love you, it doesn't mean
I care
and even though we have everything it
doesn't mean
we share. Imagine life without me, it
wouldn't be
half bad, but you could look for all
your life
and never find a love so rare

We fan the flames we dance on fire
We hurry though our lives and we never
realize
that love is everything

Just because we lust and lie, it doesn't
mean we sin and just because they keep
us out
it doesn't mean we can't go in. Pretend
that we're
just images on some forgotten star and
all our

Julie McKeand

RETURNING THE FAVOR

You,
knowing I was gullible,
vulnerable, easy to please,
and didn't ask for much,
thought you'd be
conceited, big headed,
and totally insensitive, so
You
ripped my seams apart,
used me as a rug,
dusting me, plowing me,
crushing me with
your dirty shoes.
You
left me cold,
opened the door wide
then slammed it in my face.
You
never cared, didn't dare
to ask me how I'd feel
Before you cut me
with your jagged tongue,
Raped me,
taunted me, decorated me
with pain and guilt.
But I
bit my tongue,
closed my eyes,
turned the other cheek,
didn't listen to your lies.
Now I
have the chance to do the same to
You.

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lives we played the games, we danced upon the
fire
it doesn't mean we came from there but it sur
is where we've been

Our love won't die We dance on fire
We ditch it in the turns but the passion
burns
in spite of all we've learned

Dance on fire feed the flames
Dance on fire play the games

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Joel Stepanek

A NICE PLACE TO LIVE

The light hurt Jim's eyes as he slowly opened them. His entire body ached, as though he was forced to take a long bus ride in a very small seat. His mind was foggy and he breathed heavily as he reached to scratch his head. There were small suction cups attached to long wires on his temples and the back of his head. He was a little shocked to find that he had no hair. He tried to sit up but the dizziness forced him down. He laid on a soft couch that curved with his body, while his eyes focused to the very bright light pouring from the lamps above him. He tried to call out, but his throat was very dry. All he could do was make a low, scratchy sound.

Jim remained still for a few minutes, while his breathing slowed and his eyes finally focused. He was in a completely white room on a white couch. Above him were many bright white lights in the white ceiling. The air was cool on his body. His body. He was completely naked.

A door opened, making Jim's ears pop from the pressure. The room was pressurized, but Jim did not know why. There were many things he did not understand. A few men entered speaking in whispers. They entered from behind him, so he could not make out how many men entered. The men looked Jim over but did not touch him. Jim looked them over. They were dressed in pastel jackets, making them look like doctors from the children's ward at a hospital. Finally, one man broke the silence.

"How are you feeling, Mr. Wright?"

"Thirsty." Again, Jim tried to get up but it proved too difficult. He resolved himself to laying flat and just moving his head. When the dizziness subsided, he saw there were three men. One was observing Jim's reactions, while tapping on a board he held in his hand. The board looked like an oversized clipboard with keyboard on it. The man spoke again.

"Get Mr. Wright a glass of water." The man that had neither the clipboard nor spoke went to the wall where a small spout protruded from the wall. Above the spout were two buttons colored red and blue. He held a small cup under the spout and pushed the blue button. He came over and handed the cup to Jim. Jim took the cup and the other two helped him sit up. He drank the cool water and it helped clear his throat. Sitting up still made him dizzy.

"Still dizzy?" Jim nodded as the man removed the suction cups from Jim's head.

"Put this under your tongue." The man handed Jim a small capsule. "That will help your head." Jim put the capsule under his tongue and in moments his head cleared. He could now think clearly and that was good because he had many questions.

"Mr. Wright. You probably have many questions and we will be happy to answer them all. But first, you must rest after your long ordeal."

"Ordeal?" Jim said. "I feel fine."

"That is the capsule I gave you. The dosage was very small and the effects will wear off when we get you to your room." They helped Jim to his feet and put a white robe on him. As they led him out of the room, Jim asked, "How long have I been asleep?"

"A very long time, Mr. Wright. A very long time."

They walked down a small corridor with short pile carpeting. They passed a large window that viewed a room with people on rolling tables. When Jim noticed someone that looked very familiar, he stopped.

"Come on, Mr. Woight. The effects of the pill will not last much longer and we have to get you to your room before that or we will have to carry you."

"Wait, I know that guy. I just can't remember from where."

"Sure you do. Now, come on. It is not much further."

"But . . ." They slowly pulled Jim away from the window and down the hallway.

Jim soon found they were right about the effects of the pill. It was beginning to wear off and his dizziness was coming back. They reached his room and placed him carefully on the bed where he quickly went to sleep.

Jim awoke with a terrible headache. He looked around the room. He was in a small cubicle with a door at one end, a bed mounted in the wall, and a chair at the other end

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facing a headset with a small box in front of it. Jim took the headset in his hand and tried it on. It fit like headphones but did not come all the way on. It rested just above the back of his ears. On the box were three square buttons. One with a triangle pointing right, one had two small rectangles on it, and the last had a square. Below the buttons was a slot with another button next to it.

While Jim searched his room, a small camera mounted in the ceiling followed his movements. The camera was hooked to a monitor in an adjoining room where a man in a pastel lab coat tapped on a clipboard.

The door to Jim's room opened and the man who spoke entered.

"You probably have a headache. Take this." He handed Jim a small white capsule. "This should relieve the pain."

"But it will not last long," stated Jim. The man laughed by moving his shoulders and smiling.

"No, Mr. Wright, this pill will relieve you of your headache. When it wears off, your headache will be gone."

"I don't even know your name." The man pressed a section of the wall that folded smoothly out and a container and paper cups were on the other side. The man poured water from the container into a cup and gave it to Jim. Jim took the pill and drank the water.

"My name is Mr. Amdek."

"Strange name."

"Yes." Amdek reached in the pocket of his lab coat and produced a small silver disc which he put into the slot on the wall. "Mr. Wright, please sit down and put this on." He handed Jim the headphones. Jim sat down. "This is what is known as an experiencing modulator. It will put you in situations where you will be tested."

"You mean I will be shown something and I will have to decide the right answer?"

"In a manner of speaking."

"But where is the monitor?"

"You do not understand and how could you? The best way to tell you how it works is to show you."

Amdek pushed the triangle button. Jim was now in the middle of a street with cars all around him.

"What the . . ." Jim could not finish his sentence. He was forced to dodge cars, or what seemed like cars to him. They were very smooth bubbles with people in them. He rolled to the side, almost being hit. He noticed another man dodging cars. He got up and evaded another, making his way to the side of the road. He reached the side with a one last roll and stood up. His heart was pounding. The other man had reached Jim's side of the road. How did he get in the middle of traffic? Jim heard a scream. He looked around. A small boy about four was in the middle of the street. None of the cars stopped or even slowed. The other man looked at Jim and started walking away. Jim just got out of the street and he would have to go back in.

Jim jumped in front of a car and sprinted to the child. A car went between them. When it passed, the boy had fallen on the ground in the path of a car. Jim ran to the boy, grabbed him, and jumped to the median of the road.

Jim was now in the middle of a large desert with a small group of people around him. Behind them were the remnants of an airplane fuselage. The desert stretched for miles in all directions. Jim had on a complete outfit for desert hiking and a backpack full of food, water, and camping equipment. The people either in the sand looking at him or standing at a distance watching him. Their bones were showing through their skin where the muscles no longer showed. They reminded Jim of the pictures of Poles and Czechs in work camps during World War II. None of them spoke. A small boy was squatting on the ground next to him in dirty and torn clothes that looked more like rags. He sniffed and rubbed his dry nose. The boy's mouth was chapped, and the skin around his nostrils was dry and cracked. The other people looked similarly.

"They're testing us, you know." Jim turned to see a man dressed the same way Jim was.

"What?" Jim asked.

"They're testing us. That headset they put on you. It's putting these situations in your head to see if you can survive them. It not real. The whole thing is an illusion."

"But, it seems so real."

"That is how it's supposed to feel. They

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want to see if you can survive. Come on. If we start walking, we should be able to make it a good distance before sunset."

The man looked very familiar to Jim. Yes, he was the man from the other situation. The one who got out of the street and walked away.

"But, what about these people?"

"We can't help them. They're as good as dead anyway. They haven't had food or water in days and probably couldn't eat our food if we gave them any."

"We can't leave them here."

"Are you coming or staying?"

Jim looked at the people. The boy looked up at him saying nothing. Staring at him as though he were waiting a decision. "We can't leave them like this."

"Suit yourself." The man started to walk up a small dune. Jim watched him climb. At the top of the dune he turned and yelled, "Last chance." His body shimmered as the heat rose and refracted his image.

"We can't leave them."

The man turned and disappeared over the top of the dune.

A large explosion shook the ground as Jim found he was in a battlefield during night. Flares lit up the sky making it appear almost like daylight. He looked around. The ground was full of holes and barbed wire was wrapped around tripods made from huge I-beams. There was a large area with no grass, just top soil showing. The areas that did have foliage were burnt by flames. Jim was wearing the uniform of a U. S. soldier during World War II and holding a marksman's rifle in his hands. Someone must have used the flares to aim at Jim because machine-gun fire began to race in a line at him. Jim felt someone grab the back of his jacket. Before the bullets reached him, he was pulled into the trench behind him. Jim was on his back with a man kneeling over him, yelling in his face.

"What the hell are you doing standing up in the middle of battle!" Jim looked on the man's sleeve and noticed he was a sergeant. "You do another stupid stunt like that and I'll let the Germans shoot you, you idiot!"

All Jim could say was, Thanks." Jim sat up as the sergeant turned to yell at another soldier.

"Get on that radio and get some medics in here. We've got wounded."

"Yes, Sir!" The soldier ran down the trench and disappeared in the darkness. There was dust and smoke filling the air making it difficult for Jim to breathe. Three soldiers ran past him.

"Come on! We're bugging out!" one said and then another explosion ripped the air. Jim covered his head, coughing as he crawled down the trench. He came to a section where the men were scrambling up a ladder. The sergeant was on the rim of the trench yelling over the noise.

"Get up there, you bums! Come on, come on!" He looked at Jim crawling on the ground. "Hey, kid! Get off the ground and up this ladder." An explosion ripped through the top of the ladder blowing soldiers apart. Jim quickly crawled to the sergeant who was on the ground in the trench next to the remnants of the ladder. He had a large hole in his right leg, and his left leg was almost completely gone. He was still conscious. "I hate war, kid." Jim tried to pick up the sergeant, but when he did, the sergeant screamed. "It must have gotten my back too. Look over the edge and see where our guys are." Jim looked over the rim of the trench, but could not see anything. Another explosion lit up the area and Jim saw that they were pulling out, but too far away for them to hear him yelling. Jim went back to the sergeant.

"They've pulled out. We're the last ones."

"Here, kid." The sergeant pulled out his pistol. "Don't let those bastards get me." He handed Jim the gun.

"What?"

"Come on, kid. Shoot me." He started to cough. "If they get me . . ." He could not finish. He was coughing too hard, and blood was coming from his nose and mouth. "Please, kid. Shoot me." Jim raised the pistol to the sergeant's head and pulled the trigger.

Jim was back in the small room.

"That is how the machine works, Mr. Wright." Amdek pushed the button next to the slot, and the disc was ejected. He took the disc and placed it in his coat pocket. "I think the testing is complete."

Jim could not speak. He was in shock.

"We will let you rest. I will see you

(continued)

in the morning." Amdek opened the door and exited. Jim curled up on the bed. Sleep did not come easily.

Jim slowly woke up. A small light was blinking near the door. Jim cleared his eyes and went to the section of wall where Amdek had found the container of water. He pushed on the wall. It folded down smoothly. The container was there with a breakfast of scrambled eggs, bacon, and toast. He poured and drank. When he was finally ready, he pushed the blinking light. A small part of the wall slid down. A small liquid crystal monitor was behind with a message that read:

> You will find breakfast next to the water container. Clothes are under your bed. If you need one, a toilet is across the hall. When you are ready, meet me in the last room down the corridor to your right. I should be able to explain any questions you have.
>
> Amdek

Jim got dressed and ate. He then went across the hall to wash up. He opened the door to see what was to him a normal bathroom. There was a shower, toilet, sink, but no mirror. He would like to have shaven, but there was no razor. When he was showering, he noticed he had lost weight while he was frozen. His hands were smaller and the rest of his body did not seem right. He could not put the pieces together. The hot shower would not allow him to think--it felt too good. The heat felt good after being frozen for so long.

"Frozen. What a stupid idea," he thought. "I don't know anyone . . .my family and friends are dead . . .but they were all dead anway. . .I had outlived them all . . . I had nothing to lose . . . I don't even know where I am . . .they're hooking me to some crazy machine. . . all this just to get away from cancer . . . but at least I am alive . . . I have that going for me . . ."

Jim ended the shower and walked across the hallway. He got dressed and went down the hallway to the last door. He paused before he entered, took a deep breath, and went in. He took a step back.

The room was very large. A huge table spread out before him. Surrounding the table were many people talking openly among themselves with folders filled with papers open in front of them. The man at the head of the table directly opposite Jim cleared his throat and everyone slowly stopped talking. Jim noticed Mr. Amdek among the people. Amdek smiled to Jim. The man cleared his throat again.

"Please, sit down, Jim. May I call you Jim?" he said. Jim nodded as he pulled out the large leather chair. "You are probably wondering why you are here, Jim. Well, I will tell you. We have chosen you for a very special duty. But first, a little bit of background. Mr. Amdek, if you would be so kind." Amdek swiveled his chair away from the chairman to face Jim.

"Jim, there are many things that have changed since you were frozen. The world has ended the wars that were once fought, many of them in your time. Famine was ended by the second green revolution. By recombining DNA, scientists could grow crops everywhere but the most inhospitable. With abundant food sources, the world population grew drastically. We needed a new world, new words to inhabit. These worlds were found, but they were a long way away. Even with the advanced spacecraft, the distances were staggering, and the time en route was too long for people to live. So, the passengers and crew would have to hibernate along the way. Not all people are suitable for hibernation. Many go mad, or cannot take the transition between conscience and sleep. But some people were discovered to have voluntarily put themselves to sleep. You were one of these. But for the crews of the starships, the men had to display courage, self-sacrifice, and compassion.

"A small test was devised to find the few that would be able to make the journey and succeed. There was one small problem. With the state of technology when you were put to sleep, your body could not be recovered, but your brain pattern could. Now what was needed was a body into which to put your mind. Enter the criminal element.

"Criminals in this time are not put to prison but instantly rehabilitated by recoding their minds. The very severe cases that

(continued)

cannot be rehabilitated are wiped, and their bodies are kept for further use. You may have noticed there were no mirrors where you were. This is because you have a criminal's body."

"I thought there was something strange about my body, but a completely different one never even entered my mind." Jim then remembered the body he had seen when he was first awakened. "That body I recognized was my old body."

"Yes, it was."

The chairman cleared his throat again. "Well, Jim. It seems we have cured you of your cancer, in a manner of speaking. Will you help us? We have no way of forcing you to help. You can say no, and be out of here, as you say, no strings attached." Jim thought for a few moments.

"I can't fly a spaceship. I was a contractor in my last life."

"That is not a problem," said Amdek. "You can be retrained. The attributes that you possess are hard to find and are what is needed for this job."

Jim thought again. He did not have any friends, family, or other things to do. "What the hell. I'll do it."

"Excellent," said the chairman excitedly. Everyone else seemed pleased. To them, it was business as usual. Business that went well that day. For Jim, it was the first day of the rest of his second life.

While people packed their folders away and left talking among themselves happily, Jim went to Amdek.

"I was wondering."

"Yes, Jim."

"Was that other guy in the test real?"

"You mean the one in the street and in the desert?"

"Yes."

"Yes, he was."

"What will happen to him?"

"He failed the test horribly. He will probably get a job in one of the factories or on a farm."

"Oh." Amdek led Jim to his new home, the grounds where he would be trained. Everywhere he went, people smiled and were happy. They had a purpose. So did Jim. Even with over-population, it was a nice place to live.

****

Julie McKeand

Judy Belfield

ACHINGS

Gunmetal sky rumbles a name,
suffocates the breath of clouds:
a gasp in the sudden rip
of firmament,
split like taffeta
with ravelled threads--
hanging, fluttering testament
at the edge of catastrophe.
Through the wound
a winking invitation
from the mother/bitch
to relive first experience,
to be diced into a soup of chaos
simmered for ages
tended by a syphilitic witch
wheezing a dry lullabye
learned in her nightmare past.
I've forgotten the words
but the melody is a hot ash
dropped in my lap.

****

CHANGES

Before . . . . . .
My spirit soared like a fiery horizon sky.
My heart beat hauntingly like a lonely
warrior's song.
My love for you blossomed in every springtime
flower,
My arms reached out like an opened door.
My lips thirst like a desert for your sweet
nourishment.
My thoughts of you were polished like
Egyptian gold.
My eyes decorated you with streams of pastel
images.
My faith in love was caged like some wild
animal.
But you . . . . .
brought dull morning to my horizon,
and sent the warrior on his way,
uprooted the flower by cutting the stem,
slammed the door, throwing away the key,
and brought sunny days to my scorched desert,
tainted the gold chipping it with your chisel
and brought black and gray darkening my pastel
dream, You uncaged the wild animal within me.

****

Madonna Clarke

A DISTURBING PREOCCUPATION

Grotesque images
dance obscenely
before my eyes
mesmerized I am
by the soporific
screaming of the
banshee, lamenting
she is of death
approaching. Those
mellifluous thoughts
of mine are long
gone and replaced
by feelings of my
own megalomania.
On a carousel ride
that revolves around
my psyche terror
slithers into the
farthest depths of
my soul opening
my eyes to escape
the repulsive thing
I have become.

****

Laura Boron

BABY

I don't remember much. I'm not really that old. I do remember being a little blob of tissue with a little bit of cartilage running through me. Then four little protrusions reached out from me. But none of it made sense until I gained cognition.

I remember being told that I will lose most of this knowledge the instant I'm born. What a shame. I've heard that other animals keep their knowledge when they're born, and then they know exactly what to do a few minutes after birth. It was said that when I'm born, I'll be helpless, totally dependent on others around me. It's like getting amnesia, only it takes about two years before recovery begins.

But I'm in no hurry to be born. I kinda like this room of Mom's. It's got soft padded walls, a spongy pillow, central heating that stays toasty warm, and room service directly to my tummy. I'm really rather comfortable in here, and I don't want to know how it feels to be helpless on the outside.

I guess I'm kinda helpless in my room, though. I have to ingest everything that Mom eats and drinks. Take last week, for instance She went out to some party where I could hear the music so loud, it was making me vibrate! Actually, it was kind of relaxing. But then she started eating some spicy food with extra hot sauce on it. And after the hot stuff, she cooled it down with some fermented juice. I usually prefer the orange juice that she sometimes has when we get up from sleep time. But this juice made me feel funny. It made Mom feel funny, too. After a few glasses of the stuff, she started to laugh and giggle a lot, making my room shake all over. Then, I couldn't think straight. I kept getting things mixed up. That was an awful time.

But the worst was when the air she breathed started to get dirty. She had all this smog and smoke in her lungs, and it looked positively gross! And as usual, I got my share ot it. It came through room service and into my lungs, making them dark like hers.

How could my mom do something so dirty to me? Didn't she care about me, I thought. Then it dawned on me. Maybe she didn't know about me. But how could I let her know? I couldn't talk, or else I'd just yell up to her and have conversations to get to know her better. So the next day I tried telepathy. Well, that worked to a degree. She started to wonder about me all day because all our nerves tightened up. Then she told someone, "I think I'm pregnant." But that did something I never expected. It made her cry and the person she was with started to yell. It was a deep-sounding voice and it was saying things like, "Well, I can't afford to take car of you and a kid! And how do you know it's me? Yer sleepin with somebody else every week!" This only made our nerves even tighter. Then I was bouncing all over the room. What was Mom doing? If she didn't stop whatever it was she was doing, I felt like I was gonna bounce right out of her! Finally, we slowed down and she sat on something hard and cold. She was crying pretty hard by then, and I wanted to do something for her. I didn't want her to be upset. We walked about for a while in coldness, and then entered a place that was warmer.

(continued)

Then it was sleep time again. She went to the soft sleep place and covered us with warmth. But she didn't really sleep. She laid there sniffling and constantly caressing me. It was nice to know that now she cared and knew about me, but somehow, I felt like there was something wrong. She didn't seem happy like she had been at the party.

She hasn't seemed happy since then either. I've tried telepathy again to make her happy, but I can't get through to her. Today, after sleep time, she did seem a little more at ease, though. That's good. Maybe things will go better for her now.

We've been sitting in the same place for a long time now. Right after the usual morning routine, we went for a long walk and ended here, wherever here is. Finally, we are moving. I wish I could see where we are going. I'm sort of curious about outside. Wish my room had a window to see out of. Now we're lying down again. I wonder why? It's not sleep time yet, but we are in a sleep place that's not as soft as usual. And what's that high-pitched beep-beep noise I hear? This is definitely a curious outside place. I wonder if it's music. It doesn't sound like that loud, vibrating noise I remember from a couple weeks ago. It's just a constant beep-beep, beep-beep, beep-beep.

Umfgh! What's going on? Why did Mom put her legs up? I hope she and that person with the low voice don't start rocking back and forth again. They haven't done that since just before I let Mom know about me. Maybe Mom got scared like I did when he tried to come into my room with me. Uh-oh! No such luck! Here he comes again! But wait a minute. He doesn't look the same as he did before. He's separated into two parts and he looks sharp and cold instead of warm and smooth. And now he's draining away my warmth! He didn't do that last time! Hey! Get away from me! This is my room! Go find a room of your own and leave me and Mom alone!

Aaggh! Let go of me! Mom! Mom! Help me! He's trying to take me out of my room! Mom! Please help! I'm not ready to go out there yet! Hey! Noooo! Mmrgh! I can't get loose! He's pulling me with him! I feel coldness on my head. It's getting colder and colder. Aaahh! What's that brightness? Ohh! It's so bright it hurts! Mommy!

I'm outside. Oh Mommy, it's so cold out here! Why didn't you protect me, Mommy? Why did you let him take me out? Tssgh! What's that he's putting me on. It's so cold it feels hot! And now he wants to tap into my room service! Mommy, STOP HIM!

Alone. She's left me all alone. Now without my room service and central heating, I cannot survive. Good-bye Mommy. It was nice to know you while I did. I hope you will be happy instead of sad now.

****

Ron Jackson

WHENEVER I'M DISCOURAGED

Whenever I'm discouraged
and I'm feeling very low,
if someone starts to bug me
I tell them where to go.

I stare them right between the eyes.
I see a purple haze.
I slam my nose into their fist.
I walk off in a daze.

I stagger to a hospital,
my blood is flowing free.
I seem to have a broken arm,
That's no surprise to me.

The doctor says, "You stupid kid!
What could have maimed you so?"
I stare him right between the eyes
and tell him where to go!

****

Sandra Kacmarcik

PRISCILLA'S-PROGENY

Soft little puffballs
eyes barely open
mewing 'round the
shiny saucer.
Thick rich sustenance
poured in by unseen
hand. Tiny pink
tongues that tickle
lick-lap in unison.

Nasty neighbor boys
mark another notch
on their belts of hate.
Priscilla will not
return again, her
progeny the only
sign that she has
been. The world
goes on. Welcome to
reality.

****

Judy Belfield

SUM OF ITS PARTS

Moments when something
you've said or
maybe thought
I catch up
then pin down
to study later
as if exotic moths
as yet unclassified,
moments between you and me--
flashing insignificantly
in infinity
are somehow
the all of all:
Something said, perhaps,
or merely thought
beyond the edge of this universe
by some intelligence communicating
on an undetected wave
connects to you, to me;
in a moment
we know something
we cannot pin down, examine,
think about.
But when a sudden music
plays our skin with gentle fingers
and we begin to quiver
we are wiser than God.

****

Steve Black

THE WORLD GOES ON AND ON

Have you heard about the weather?
It's national news
The rivers are overflowing
People are rowing to the store

Worst flooding in recent history
Will insurance cover this?
Traffic is log-jammed
On the few dry roads

I've heard people say
they're counting the days
Until forty
They want the world to end

Alas, the rains stopped
Before forty
It will be months
Before recovery is complete

Damage is in the billions
Those most in need
Will never break even
Of course not

The dreams of many
Will be irreversibly shattered
For others
It was a lively adventure

The rich will be reimbursed
With interest
The poor will take the loss
The world goes on and on

****

Steve Black

MOMMY'S SWEETHEART

There was a young lass named Bobbie,
Who wanted a boy named Robby.
She called his home,
He moved to Nome,
That's what his mother told Bobbie.

****

Steve Siedler

TOO DEEP FOR ME

As a young child,
I was much smaller,
Much lighter
   and easier to toss about
I could never quite master
   man's response to disaster,
And coloring within the lines,
was philosophically incongruent.
But I tried,
And the pictures were so nice,
And the cow leaped over the
   orbiting lunar spheroid.

Then,
One day,
I'm not quite sure when,
But I was coloring again,
And I realized that,
sometimes--
the lines need to be moved.

****

Madonna Clarke

A LIFE HISTORY

A life history of
Deep imprinted lines
Silver streamers surround
A decaying mind
Slower movements make
For loss of agility
The simplicty from
The lack of ability
The memories soar
Like a picture show
Destined for the trail
Of slowly becoming old.

****

Julie McKeand

PIRATE

Oh, pirate,
who sails amongst the sea of love
in your ship of steady mass
A black patch covers your stormy eyes,
a shield of steel covers your heart.
Just exactly where are you going?
Is your life planned with a map?
Are you floating about recklessly,
unsure of the harbor you are destined?
Oh noble, fearless pirate,
many stormy nights you have conquered,
no matter how strong the winds blew.
But I see threatening weather approaching.
And her am I,
a peasant offering my love
as a place to rest your soul.
I was being the harbor you
had been searching for.
Then tell me,
you wandering pirate,
why your words and actions
cut like a sword
upon my heart?

****

Ruth Bosard

STRANGULATION

The sun
hidden above
shaded by the dark clouds
constricted and suffocated
Now dark

****

Steve Black

ONE MORE SMOKE

I gave up drinking too many hangovers
Prob'ly I'll start again
No more drugs too old for that
Maybe pot now and then

I don't get women as much as I want
I sure as hell don't want men
All that's left is cigarette smoking
Gotta do something in the den

One more smoke before I go
One more smoke today
One more smoke is all I'm wanting
Maybe two what the hay

Late at night and nothing to do
Really should go to bed
Gotta get up and work at living
Can't wind down all in the head

(continued)

One More Smoke, continued

One more smoke before I go
One more smoke today
One more smoke is all I'm asking
Maybe two what the hay

Could be someday I'll quit all out
Say it's not good for you
Where's the fun in living till ninety
If there's been nothing bad to do

One more smoke before I go
One more smoke today
One more smoke is all I'm needing
Maybe two what the hay

Lamention's done smokes are numbered
Should have bought more today
Wish I had another to offer
24 store just down the way

One more smoke before I go
One more smoke today
One more smoke is all I'm craving
Maybe two okay

****

Madonna Clarke

THE COLOR BLACK

Dark and unforseeable
Mystical yet tranquil
Deep and shallow
Cool as the earth
Outlining and supporting
Simple Basics
Sexy lingerie
A sorceress spell
Halloween cats
Diversified always in
Personified fear.

****

Judy Belfield

HAPPY BIRTHDAY AGAIN

Years spread
like raspberry preserves
over soft bread
eaten up by a giant,
a time-monster
biting away at our lives
and enjoying;
smiling
sadistic beast
salivating
his appetite voracious
never sated--
even on the day
he swallows himself.

****

Ruth Bosard

ENDINGS

Thump thump . . . thump thump was all he heard over his ragged breaths. As he drew closer to his goal, another sound joined in. It was a roar of garbled voices and thundering like a flock of birds flapping their wings. He felt the salty perspiration trickle into his eyes and it burned some until he blinked it away. His gaze was focused straight ahead as he put more energy into his actions. His leg muscles cried out in protest, but he knew the stinging pain would be gone soon. Yes, the end was near. Thump, thump . . . thump, thump. Inhale, exhale. Inhale, exhale and suddenly he felt the string break across his chest and his mind registered one outside noise. "The winner of the ten mile race is . . ."

****

Steve Black

GUY THE FLY

I see a little fly,
I think I'll name him Guy.
Suddenly, "Whap!"
Guy will nap,
Eternally, determined I.

****

Sandra Kacmarcik

GYPSY

What do you want
from me,gypsy man,
with your opaque eyes
that hide whatever
motive lies deep inside?
You call my husband
brother and me your
friend, but we don't
know you.

You invited us to
your house and served
suckling pig spread,
like a sleeping baby,
on an oval bed. The
sight assaulted my
eyes, but the pungent
aroma seduced at my
nostrils. You tried
to drug us drunk
with wine, as you
sat at table's head
adorned in a white
V-neck blouse of
finest silk, ornamented
in ruffles. The gold
medallion at your neck,
gold bracelets, and
gold rings, designate
you king. But we
don't even know you.

You offered toasts in a
rich accent, and hurled
glasses against the wall.
Your wife danced upon the
tabletop and played at
her guitar. When she
finished, you took it by
the neck, strangled it,
and smashed it across
the bar. But we still
don't know you.

You entertained us in
an elegant restaurant
and tried to drug us
drunk. You ordered
expensive champagne,
the best in the house,
and surrounded yourself
with men to left and
right, and handmaidens
at the foot of the
table. You called my
husband your brother
and me your friend, and
we don't even know you.

In a magnificent gesture
you produced, from I don't
know where, a gold box,
wrapped in gold foil, and
topped with a gold rosette.
Your lieutenant made a speech
about the women behind the
men (and at the foot of the
table.) You surveyed us
with your black eyes and
called my husband brother
and me your friend, but
we don't know where you
are coming from.

You gestured the gift be
opened and the contents
be worn--a glittering
chain and medallion of
gold, a miniature of your
own. Every woman in
attendance wore a matching
one--except for your wife,
Marianna, who fingered a
pendant shimmering of
pink luminescence. I
had never seen pink gold
before, but I knew that
it was pure. Then you
surveyed us with your
black eyes and called
my husband your brother
and me your friend,
and I wondered what you
wanted from me. I don't
even know you.

When the evening was
complete, and everyone
filled to saturation
with food and wine, the
waitress fell upon your
neck, kissing your cheek
in adulation. And as the
women took their leave
and hugged you their
response, I gave you a
Judas kiss to see what
lies inside your chest,
and you were dead. I
never believed in devils,
but I question if you are
one, sent to appeal to
the greed that feigns
sleep, deep within our
hearts. Who gives such
elegant gifts expecting
no return, when they
don't even know you?

Gypsy man don't con me.
Your stakes are far too
cheap. All you want is
money, but I play for keeps.
I want your soul, but you
don't own one. My husband
is not your brother, and I
am not your friend. We
will not go next Saturday
night. You don't know
this--
gypsy woman.

****

Ruth Bosard

RONNIE

A yellow Big Wheel with red stripes roared through the fence onto the dirt-covered playground. Ronnie had arrived! He stood to get a better look around and brushed the dust from the seat of his Osh-Kosh overalls. He spotted two girls from the first grade and pedalled as hard as he could toward them. With a swift yank of the handle bars, Ronnie and his Big Wheel went into a spin sending dust everywhere.

"Ronnie, you cut that out," screamed the pudgy girl. Ronnie smirked.

He then rode away to where two boys from his kindergarten class were kicking a ball back and forth. Ronnie gave them an innocent look and asked if he could try. The one in a beat-up Mickey Mouse t-shirt gave the other a skeptical look and shrugged as he gave Ronnie the ball.

He held it in front of him with both hands. He brought his foot back and put all his might into sending the ball way over the fenced-in area. He hardly heard the "Oh, Ronnie, you jerkface," as he jumped onto his Big Wheel and pedalled off in the other direction.

He glanced back at the boys and a laugh slipped out. He then searched the swing sets and spotted Melvie with his horn-rimmed glasses.

"Hey, Melvie, betcha can't climb the fence," dared Ronnie.

"I can't get dirty today," replied the shy boy.

"Oh, you're just chicken. Anyway, I won't even get dirty," taunted Ronnie.

He started up the fence and got three feet when his left foot slipped and he landed on his backside hard in the dust and dirt covered the spot.

Melvie was standing over him giggling. Ronnie stood up and swung his foot hard into Melvie's shin bone. Quickly then he jumped onto his Big Wheel and rode like lightning out of the playground.

A few minutes later he slammed through the screen door and cried with tears in his eyes, "Mommy, you'll never believe what they did to me."

His mother looked at him with sympathy and said, "I told you never to play with those mean kids again."

****

Steve Black

SUSIE

I knew a girl named Susie,
Mostly she was a floozie,
Once and again,
She'd entertain men,
And rob them when they were woozie.

****

Penny Sartori

NO MORE TEARS FOR CASSIE

Everything was blurred as she sat staring out the small window. Her eyes brimmed with tears. She tried to blink them away, but it was no use. Rain splashed against the window pane, but it really didn't matter. There was nothing to see except the other dormitory wing which ran parallel to the one she lived in.

She had been here a month now and finally had convinced herself that her mom and dad didn't want her. What had ever made her think they were any different? One thing was for sure: She had trusted her last adult.

Was it really only three years ago that she had gone to live with the McCleary's? Had she really only lived nine years? Somehow, she knew being nine wasn't supposed to feel like this.

Suddenly, out of the corner of her eye, she caught a glimpse of Sharon Lavery, the twelve-year-old dorm bully, as she snatched her pink hair brush off the small chest beside the bed. It wasn't a particularly expensive brush, but it was extremely special. She called it pink pearl, but it was actually just a pale pink plastic. The name "Cassie" was engraved on the handle.

The brush was one of the few things that hadn't been taken from Cassie, either by the

(continued)

staff or by the other kids. Her "real" dad had bought it for her on her eighth birthday. He had even been sober when he came to the McCleary's that day. He had given it to her and told her it was time she started acting and looking like a girl. She had promised that she would try, even though it was hard when you were bigger and stronger than all the kids your age, girls and boys. Mrs. McCleary had made a cake, and they had all laughed and had a great time. It had been her happiest birthday ever, and she had sworn she would treasure the brush forever. She wasn't about to give it up now, at least not without a fight.

"Wait! Gimme that brush!" Cassie yelled. She was off the straight, hard-backed chair in a flash. "You bitch! I've had it with you!" she screamed as she raced down the hall after Sharon. Cassie's long legs caught up with Sharon before she could turn the corner, but Cassie never had a chance. Even though she was as tall and almost as strong as Sharon, Cassie just didn't have that "killer instinct" which Sharon had developed during seven years at "The Home."

Through eyes that opened barely to a slit after the beating, Cassie looked up into the cold, expressionless face of Sharon Lavery, who was straddling her body with one hand pinning Cassie at the shoulder and the other at her throat. "Listen, giraffe legs," Sharon sneered. "In here, I'm the boss, the General, you might say, and I get what I want." With that, she took her hand away from Cassie's throat and grabbed the brush from Molly Delacrois, who had picked it up off the floor when the fight started. "But this brush--well, this brush is a piece of shit!" She hurled it back down the hall, striking the concrete block wall and shattering the handle. Sharon and her little "soldierettes" all laughed and took turns giving Cassie one more kick as she lay motionless on the floor.

Just when she thought she couldn't stand any more, Cassie recognized, somewhere above her, the voice of her sister, Connie. Connie was twelve also, and she was not only bigger than Sharon, she was every bit as mean. Most of the kids thought she was crazy and tried to stay out of her way. "Ya know, Sharon, you slut, I don't like her a whole lot myself, but I like you even less. If you touch her again, I will rip your face off."

Connie leaned down and jerked Cassie to her feet. Sharon and her little platoon of about five moved aside, but Sharon just couldn't resist one last comment. "Hey Connie, you bull dike, keep your smart-assed little sister out of my way, or I might not let her off so easy next time." When Connie spoke, she had a gleam in her eye and an edge to her voice that even shut Sharon up. "And ya know what, Sharon? I'd love to see you hurt her 'cause then I'd have to defend my little sister by slittin' your miserable throat."

That night, as Cassie lay in her narrow, lumpy bed, she tried not to think about how badly she was hurting. She tried to remember a time when they'd all been together--her and her sisters, Connie, Cathy, and Corrie, and their parents. She couldn't, and she guessed it was just too long ago. She knew what had happened, though. Kate McCleary had explained it all to her, never being judgmental, just factual. Cassie had even more or less come to understand it all--that is, until last month.

Back in 1950, Cassie's father, Dave Shelton, was an ironworker, making exceptionally good wages. Unfortunately, the work wasn't steady, and Dave, who had always liked to drink, began drinking more and more. Gradually, more often than not, as work did become available, Dave was not. Finally, he quit going to work at all or coming home, and there was no money.

In desperation one morning, Lana Shelton and her four small daughters, aged five, three, two, and one, walked into the police department of the small town where they lived. The officer on duty looked up into the pathetic face of the twenty-four-year-old woman who looked at least forty. "Can I help ya, uh, Mrs. Shelton, isn't it?" he asked. She seemed unable to speak. "Ma'am. it's one in the morning. Kinda late for the kids to be out, ain't it?"

When she finally spoke, her voice was barely audible. "These are my daughters: Constance, Catherine, Cassandra, and Corrine. I have no food and no money. I'm leaving them with you." She pushed the baby into his arms and walked out of the station.

"Hey! Hey lady! Wait! You just

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can't--hey! Where the hell are you goin?!!" She was gone.

For almost four years, Cassie was shifted from one foster home to another. Her mother eventually was able to make arrangements to take Corrie back but said she just couldn't take care of more than one child.

Cathy was the fortunate one. On the first attempt, the social worker was able to place Cathy in a home with people who treated her well and cared for her.

Connie was classified emotionally disturbed. She was aggressive and tended to become violent. Other children and even some adults were afraid of her. No one really tried to work with her. It was just easier to send her to "The Home."

Cassie, on the other hand, was not mean, but she was big, and sad as it sounds, she had never learned how to play. She was taken from three different foster homes because she was "too rough" with the other children. Mrs. Mason, the social worker, inaccurately assumed Cassie had the same violent temperament as Connie. In what she called "a last ditch effort before The Home," when Cassie was six, Mrs. Mason placed her with the McCleary's. The McCleary's were a childless couple in their late 40's. They were unable to have children and due to a childhood injury which had left Mrs. McCleary with a deformed arm, they had been repeatedly rejected by adoption agencies.

Cassie remembered that Mrs. Mason had brought her to the McCleary's on a sunny summer Saturday afternoon. Cassie was only six, but she already understood that you didn't learn to love or trust grown-ups, because tomorrow they would probably be gone, or you would be. Charlie McCleary smiled a lot, and Cassie had to try real hard not to like him. Mrs. McCleary, on the other hand, obviously did not like her. That became apparent to Cassie the minute they sat down to dinner.

A fastidious person, Kate McCleary just would not tolerate certain things, among them bad manners. Cassie had never been anywhere long enough to learn them, so naturally she had even less than most children her age. Kate, in her gentle, but firm voice, suggested that Cassie remove her elbows from the table and chew with her mouth closed. As she moved her elbows, over went her glass of milk. The three of them tripped over each other trying to clean it up, anc Cassie knew she'd be gone by Monday.

That night, Cassie refused Charlie's offer to help unpack her suitcase. She knew this was just a brief stop on her way to "The Home." She had been there twice with her "real" mother to visit Connie, and the thought of living there simply terrified her. Like so many nights in her short life, Cassie cried herself to sleep.

The next morning Kate announced they would go to church. Cassie tried to refuse but lost the argument. She had caught just a hint of a grin on Charlie's face and knew he thought it was funny that his wife was so mean to her already. "Well, fine," she had thought. "I just won't like him either!"

Later that afternoon the smell of Kate's Sunday roast beef had driven Cassie out to the back yard. She wasn't about to eat any of it, so she certainly wasn't going to sit there and smell it! She stopped abruptly just outside the back door at the sight of the most beautiful flower garden she had ever seen. Then, before she even realized what she was doing, she was in the middle of it, sobbing, jerking roses off the bushes and ripping daffodils and marigolds out of the ground.

Suddenly, she felt a pair of strong arms around her, and a gentle voice whispered into her ear, "She corrects my manners too, and she makes me go to church, but she wouldn't give me away for anything. If you'll help me, I bet we can replant most of these flowers before dinner's ready, and we'll put the roses in a vase for Kate. The rest will be our secret, okay?" She looked up into Charlie McCleary's understanding eyes. "Okay," she sobbed. As they worked she couldn't have sworn she had seen Kate watching them, but no, surely if she had seen, Mrs. Mason would have been here to get her by now. "Maybe she's on her way," Cassie had thought.

When Charlie and Cassie came inside, Kate was busy putting dinner on the table. Cassie noticed three places were set. "I guess they're going to at least feed me before I go," she had said to herself. She decided to wash her hands before dinner. On the way to the bathroom, she passed the room she had slept in. She noticed her suitcase open on the bed. It was empty. She went in and

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began looking for her few clothes. She found them all neatly folded in drawers or hung in the closet.

She was startled by Kate's voice. "Maybe after school tomorrow we can do a little shopping. You'll need more school clothes. Now, how about dinner?"

"I'm starved!" Cassie yelled. "Oh! I have to wash my hands first." Kate simply smiled.

At dinner a bouquet of roses sat in the center of the table. Kate thanked Cassie for "butting" them for her. The incident was never mentioned again.

Kate and Charlie became Mom and Dad. For three years, life was wonderful. Cassie's natural parents were allowed visits. She loved her "real" father in spite of the fact that he had become a pitiful drunk. She was the only one of his daughters who wanted anything to do with him, and she looked forward to his visits. She knew, however, not to look for him until she saw his 6'7" frame bending to fit through the doorway. Her new mom was always kind and patient with him even when he arrived drunk.

Her mother visited only twice until a few months before Cassie's ninth birthday. Then, all of a sudden, she began regular weekly visits, and usually brought her new boyfriend, Sam. One beautiful Sunday, early in September, Sam and Lana came to take Cassie on a picnic. Cassie thought she saw tears in her mom and dad's eyes as she waved good-bye. "See ya tonight!" she had hollered as they pulled away.

She hadn't seen or heard from them since. Once Lana dropped her off at "The Home," she hadn't seen her either.

When she was sure the other girls were asleep, she let the tears flow freely. "What did I do wrong?" she cried in the darkness. "I tried not to eat too much, so maybe I wouldn't grow so fast! I slouched over, so maybe mom wouldn't notice my dresses were too short!" Finally, once again, she cried herself to sleep.

She was awakened early Sunday morning by the sound of familiar voices. At first, she was sure she must be dreaming, because the loud, shrill voice sounded too big to be coming from the little lady she knew it belonged to. She knew she was awake, though, when she heard the soft-spoken man say, "Now, Kate, calm down. We've waited this long. If she says visiting hours don't start until 9, we can wait a little longer."

"Like hell I will!" she shouted for the world to hear. "I went along with not telling her the truth because Lana and Mrs. Mason insisted. I even went along with this cruel, one-month "no visits" orientation period, because that was the rule; but do you see these, Charlie? These are all our letters! They haven't even given her one of them! Rules, I suppose! She's been sittin' in here for a month thinkin' nobody gives a damn! All of this because Lana was afraid she was becoming so attached to us that she wouldn't want to live with her when, and IF, this guy marries her!"

The house mother tried to say something about Lana Shelton's rights as the natural mother, and Kate's rage exploded then. "Her rights? Where was she during the mumps, the measles, and the chicken pox? Where was she during the struggles at school with Dick and Jane and Sally and Spot and Puff? She wouldn't know who they are! I didn't either, but I learned! Her rights? What about Cassie's rights? There is something terribly wrong with a system that lets a child be pushed around from place to place, and then stuck away to be forgotten because of some adult's rights!"

"I'm sorry, Mrs. McCleary, you'll have to . . ." The house mother's words were lost as the hallway became a blur of long legs. Cassie flew down the hallway and into the waiting arms of the mom and dad who loved her enough to fight for her. She looked up into the kind, patient face of the man and knew she was loved. She looked directly into the fiery blue eyes of the woman and knew she could trust.

Charlie and Kate had to leave her that night, but Cassie knew they would be back. She knew that somehow they would find a way to take her home.

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Doug Paul

GHOST HOOFPRINTS ACROSS THE PRAIRIE

Sagebrush blown across the sand
the eerie stillness
fading echoes of a galloping cadence

Hundreds roamed across this land
the empty vastness
graceful manes on such noble beasts

Conquistadors mapped this territory
tortoise shell armor rusting on a
prairie dog mound

Mustangs owned the West
the lasting sadness
there were many, gone in the wake of
a dust cloud.

****

Elizabeth Russell

ANCIENT EGYPT

The body lies curled in the fetal position. It is female. Most of the skin remains, petrified. The grave is shallow and round. Broken pottery, grain, a grass mat, and other articles are scattered within the small tomb. The woman is Egyptian. Uncannily, her soul seems to remain.

The grave and body described above is one of the many artifacts of Ancient Egypt displayed in the "Egypt" section of the Field Museum in Chicago, Illinois. The place, my favorite above any else, seems to seethe with living souls of this ancient civilization. Sometimes I feel like I am actually standing on the banks of the Nile or solemnly participating in some ancient funeral rite inside one of the great pyramids of the "Ancient World." The atmosphere is overpoweringly sensual.

The actual rooms housing the artifacts are located on the lower level of the museum. The lighting is very subdued, like dusk, which adds to the air of mystery. The silence is deafening, yet the voices of these mummified Egyptians seem to cry out

Laura Boron

UNDER THE BRIGHTNESS OF THE MOON

Alone, under the brightness of the moon
Our bodies touched in a long embrace.
Slowly, ever so slowly,
You raised your head and looked into my eyes.

Alone, under the brightness of the moon,
Years went by as your eyes moved through me.
They stared far beyond my masks of the day
And pierced my traps of secret personality.
Soon, your beautiful brown eyes found their
way to my heart
And I could feel your love within me.

Together, under the brightness of the moon,
Our souls touched in a long embrace.
Slowly, ever so slowly,
You lowered your face and gently kissed my
lips.

Puffy grey clouds eased across the sky
Dimming the brightness of the moon.
But as we moved apart from the kiss,
A light still glimmered

For in that magical moment,
Together, under the brightness of the moon,
Our souls joined and became one,
Creating within us a glow which shall never
dim.

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out to the life inside of me.

The artifacts that are on display give a glimpse of the everyday lives of these mysterious people. Jewelry, children's toys, tools, things that we today use, comment even more on the reality of these people, who to most, are just a story in a book.

Mummified pets are artifacts that stir me the most. Several glass cases display the remains of the animals. Cats, (mainly cats, as the Egyptians were great worshippers of cats) birds, jackals: all are neatly wrapped in decayed linen thousands of years old. Sometimes I try to reflect on what my own little white mutt would look like "swaddled" from head to toe.

Rooms made up to resemble the insides of pyramids display actual wall paintings depicting the Egyptians in all phases of life. The majority of them concentrate on the worshipping of Amon-Re, their chief god. When inside these room, I feel like I'm taking a

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long journey to the mystical "Lake of Fire," the Egyptian place of after-life. Ancient whispers swirl by. Shadows of great pharoahs float aimlessly through the tombs. The smell of frankincense and myrhh delicately mingle with the ancient dust of the stones. Farther off there are hollow echoes of a tune played on a lyre, and delicate laughter of maidens languishing in pools of cool, scented water. Have I been transported through time?

The grandest display of the entire Egyptian world is the actual human mummies. Their remains are layered and layered over and over again with strips of fine linen, now discolored and crumbling. The elaborate outer coffins depict life--like paintings of the deceased's face and body. In a sense, these people have never left this world. An energy fills this place; the energy of souls. One mummy has been unwrapped to show the actual remains. The arms are folded over the chest. Everything has been preserved: eyelashes, hair, finger and toe nails, skin. The most haunting feature is the hollow eye sockets. But they see me, they watch me as closely as I watch them. They seem to want to rise and come to me, and ask me, "Why?"

The greatness of Egypt is felt in this place. It's magical and mystical. I've visited it hundreds of times. The mystery never dies. Each time I visit, I hope I'll meet one of these ancient beings around the next turn. I've always wished I could go back in time to Ancient Egypt.

****

Doug Paul

GOBLINS IN MY CRAWLSPACE

Pitter-patter across my roof
and a howling at the moon
Satanic Seance in the darkness
Lucifer laughing with delight

Noises from the upstairs
Children murdered in their beds
a lunatic locked up in the cellar
collects their pretty little heads

Goblins in my crawlspace
evil at my door
ghosts that walk behind me
rats beneath my floor

Sacrificial virgins
gathered for the feast
demons nibble on the fingers
the rest is for the beast

What's around the corner
a candle flickers in the dark
sinister singing from the courtyard
the jackals howl from their dens

Goblins in my crawlspace
evil at my door
ghosts that walk behind me
rats beneath my floor

****

Sandra Kacmarcik

HOLOGRAM

I awaited the peace of death
To put my weary soul to rest
Only to find
Not even death could kill my mind

I am united with my past
Fragment of mold from which I cast
Not complete
In death there is no relief

Uninterrupted life must flow
To attain its God-like soul
My tainted seeds
Remain to scrutinize my deeds

Violent whirlpool of pollution
Slowly cleansing though evolution
Damnable duration . . .
How many are a generation?

Vicariously living out each day
No longer with a role to play
Spectator of life
My mistakes are my strife

But, to know life will be like him
When life is purged of all sin
Makes it worth
Rebirth, rebirth, rebirth, re . . .

****

Judy Belfield

NOW AND FOREVER

Nothing spoken, heard,
on this floor--
elevator doors slide
together
my body a cement block
in the corner
like centrifuged blood
stuck at the bottom;
my eyelids drop slowly
as a perfume of Eastern
mystery
trickles through the duct
overhead and fills the car
with an Oriental riddle
I will never untangle.
The floating room rises
well-oiled, soundlessly,
flourescent lights as
coldly static
as darkness in space.
I feel upwardness--
a direction without
end
marked by odors
emanating as vividly
as colored smoke.
Temporary delays
at each new level:
the doors open
reveal places
where, once, ancient gods' voices
spilled the answers
to all questions
but no more.
The doors slide
together
close out void
which cannot swallow up
the stench of cheap cigars.

****

Julie McKeand

ALCOHOLISM

is a dark and troubling creature
that lashes out at him
with sharp claws,
while he shudders in fear
as it booms across the room,
disguised as an arguing voice.
Its venom pours from a bottle
and quenches the fool's problems,
but only for a little while
then it leaves this fool
hungover and depressed,
so unaware of the precious life,
and so vulnerable
unable to resist its
sweet sour concoction.
It is the axe
that chops away at
his family tree.
Its presence can only be seen
when the final cut is made
and the sturdy tree breaks
crashing to the ground
scattering seeds everywhere
as they quickly roll
down his face.
It kidnaps and hurts
the only thing that
will save this fool for end.
Alcoholism is
killing this lonely soul tonight.

****

Julie McKeand

PAPER FLOWER

Look at you,
all shriveled and crest-fallen
leaning over your branched balcony
exhausted from holding
summer secrets
and lying with
mouth pried open
anxiously awaiting
nature's white wine.
Perhaps suddenly,
rolled in a bed of diamonds
and tickled with
rich fingers
you will bloom into
the hidden beauty
that you are.

****

Julie McKeand

SKATER

China glass figurine,
prancing across heaven's street
mane whipping in the wind.
Glistening on this starry night
Parading, neverending
a spinning ball of sequence
heart racing to the music.
Structured like a glacier
floating, brilliantly
as if unreal.
Then suddenly leaping
across a dome of lights
draping herself
evaporating into the ice.

****

Sandra Kacmarcik

A REDNECK IS A MAN WHO--

wears a soiled baseball cap
has hair hanging over his collar
wears a dark-plaid shirt
wears bib overalls
spits a lot
drives a beat-up truck
has a gun rack in the back window
carries a loaded shotgun in the rack
has a hound dog with its head hanging out the side window
raises pit bulldogs to fight
cries when his best cock gets killed
can shoot the head off a gobbler, with a rifle, at 150 feet
mentions the Civil War at least once a day
still thinks the South won
supports the moral majority
fights commies in his backyard
doesn't have to belong to a survivalist group
sings the loudest when they play the national anthem
says the loudest amen when the preacher asks the blessing
has one wife and three girlfriends
talks in monosyllables and grunts a lot
works like a mule
will give you the shirt off his back, if he likes you--even if you are a damn yankee.

****

Paulette Georgantas

YOU DON'T HUNT IN MY WOODS

Hey you!
Red flannel jacket
And combat boots,
Come to kill what lives in this forest,
Put down that gun!
You don't hunt in my woods!

I
Bought this land
In desolation,
Stripped naked by your kind,
Grasping and grabbing
For all you could kill and carry away,
In the years of delusion,
When all comers were welcome.

I
Spent my life,
The blood of my soul,
Like cash,
Seeding the soul,
Fought back the fires
Set by you scavengers,
Coming to kill what lives in my woodland,
In error, believing in the goodness of mankind.

I
Weathered the seasons,
Sifting the ash, waiting for new growth,
Suffered the cold of confusion
Planted the oak, pine and birch
Until the birds nested again in my branches,
Poured out my strength ponding the stream,
Draining the hillsides,
Resting the goose and the swan
From the sorrow of hunters.

Only the wind and light laughter
Can blow through these tree-tops.
Only the gentle may enter its borders.
Wisdom and knowledge,
With feet that don't trample,
May walk in the foliage of fawning of new life.

But you!
Blinded eyes,
That don't see what's before you,
Get out!
Get off my land!
You don't hunt in my woods!

****

MRS. JONES DIDN'T LIKE CATS

Steve looked tired as he stared out the window. It was a warm day, but rather humid to be cutting grass. Steve picked up his glass of Pepsi and the condensation dripped off. He looked back out the window at his lawnmower. Steve was thinking about his girlfriend, Melissa, how they were going to be able to see each other on Sunday, and how . . .

"Steve!" His mother woke him up from his dream with a harsh voice. "Steve, you better get going. You've got seven lawns to cut and you're sitting here wasting time."

Steve glanced over at his mom, then returned to his Pepsi. "And Steven," she continued, "Mrs. Jones called last night while you were gone. She wants you to cut her lawn this year, so please go over and talk to her. Also, Mrs. Hill is expecting company this afternoon and she would appreciate it if you could cut her grass this morning, so why don't you go there first."

Steve got up and left the house. His mother was busy with Saturday cleaning, so there was no sense sticking around here. Besides, he had work to do. When school was still in session, Steve always spent Friday evening and all day Saturday cutting grass.

He got his Lawnboy out of the shed, loaded up the grass catchers, plastic bags, and hand clippers, filled the gas tank, and started on his way. As he was walking down the public sidewalk, his mother's word came back to him.

Mrs. Jones had called. Oh, why did she have to call anyways. Mrs. Jones was a fussy, old lady who was never satisfied with his work. Oh well, forget about her for now, Steve thought. I'll worry about her when I get there.

Steve worked all through the day, and finally got to Mrs. Jones' house about six o'clock. As soon as he got there, he heard a rumble from the window. Steve looked up and saw Mrs. Jones smiling in the window. The curtains were shut, but she had pulled them back and now her old, grey-haired and wrinkled face could be seen. Steve did not smile or wave. He walked around to the back of the house to check out the lawn before he cut it.

In the back yard, Steve found what he expected. The neighbors on the east side owned a big weeping willow that hung over into Mrs. Jones' yard. To Steve, it seemed that more branches fell into Mrs. Jones' yard than were left on the tree. He grudgingly picked up the sticks and threw them into the neighbor's yard.

Steve walked back out to the front of the house, set the clippers and plastic bags on Mrs. Jones' front steps, placed a grass catcher over the chute, and started his lawn mower. The Lawnboy was still warm from the last lawn and it started up easily. Steve surveyed the parkway as he cut it. He noticed a beer can in the hole where a tree once stood. Last year, bees lived in the hole and were always giving him trouble.

As Steve got closer to the house, he cringed. He was already tired, and he reached the tough part of Mrs. Jones' lawn. For some reason, she had thick grass that extended from halfway between the house and the street in the front to the fence at the end of the back yard. None of Steve's other customers had such thick and tough lawns.

Steve finished the lawn and was about to go around to the front, when Mrs. Jones stuck her pruned face out the back door. "Steve," she called. Her voice was gravelly and unsteady, just the way Steve remembered it. Her voice was rusty from lack of use. He hated to talk to her, but she had called his name, and he couldn't pretend that he hadn't heard because he had made eye contact with her when he heard the door release.

"Steve," she called again, and this time her voice was steadier. Steve walked up to the back door.

"Yes, Mrs. Jones," he answered.

"Steve, please clip around the back stair and walkway here with your hand clippers," Mrs. Jones said. "I don't like looking out the window and seeing the grass like that."

"Okay," was Steve's only response.

"Oh, and Steve," she continued, "please put any plastic bags of grass you have along the west side of the house on the cobblestone path."

"Okay, Mrs. Jones," Steve answered and

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walked back to the lawnmower. He quickly emptied the grass catcher into a single plastic bag, and he placed the bag on the cobblestone walk. He did the clipping, and when he had finished, he gathered all of his belongings together and knocked on the front door. It looked like it was about to rain, but Steve had one more lawn to do before he could retire for the day. The door slowly opened, and Steve saw Mrs. Jones with her walker.

"Come on in," she called. Steve stepped inside, and the door shut behind him. "I have to get your money." Mrs. Jones wearily made her way toward the kitchen on Steve's left. He could see her purse on the counter.

I have to get my money and leave, he thought. Steve glanced around the living room where he was standing. Mrs. Jones' living room was immaculately clean. Steve saw some old black and white photographs in front of him. Probably her husband, he thought. All of the furniture was old, but in good condition. The furniture appeared to have a contemporary 1920's design to it, from what Steve had seen in old books. A fifteen-inch color TV set sat on an antique round table in the corner. The color seemed to be different from the color he was used to, but wasn't sure if it was because Mrs. Jones had moved the color control set all the way to one side, or if the set was that way from old age. To his left on the wall was a college degree from some school Steve had never heard of, but the degree indicated that Mrs. Jones had majored in music education before she got married. That would explain why she had a baby grand piano in the living room. The finish on the piano itself looked as if it was a hundred years old, and it naturally fit in with the rest of the decor of the room. Mrs. Jones hobbled back to Steve with her walker and handed him six dollars. "Is that right?" she asked.

"Well, I'm charging seven dollars this year," Steve replied.

"Oh, I see," answered Mrs. Jones. "Just a minute." She turned and hobbled back into the kitchen, and Steve was left alone in the living room again. I really must be going, he thought. That rain is getting closer. As Steve looked around again, it seemed strange to him. It was all very neat, but it seemed like the room had been transformed from he 1920's to the present. The only furniture in the room that was not coordinated in the 1920's theme were the two chairs, the couch, and the television. The off-color of the set made it appear to be one of the first experimental models of color TV.

Mrs. Jones returned with the dollar. "I'm sorry I move so slow," as she clung to her walker. "When you get eighty-seven years old, sometimes you can't do all of the things you would like to do. Last week I hurt my back. Oh, here's the dollar."

She kept giving me that line about her back last year, Steve thought. He took the dollar from her, and put it in his back pocket with the rest of his money. He felt a little guilty taking it from her, with her being so old and frail.

"Last year you charged six dollars, didn't you?" Mrs. Jones asked.

"Yes," he answered.

"And this year you're charging seven?"

"Right," said Steve.

"Well, I'll give it to you because I want to be considered a customer," replied the old woman. "Are you a senior this year?"

Oh no, thought Steve. He wasn't in the mood to play twenty questions. All he wanted now was to leave and cut that last lawn before the rain started. "Yes, I'm a senior," Steve replied.

"What college are you going to?" inquired Mrs. Jones.

"Well, I'm considering DePaul and U of I," he answered.

"What are you going to major in?" she asked.

"Probably music education."

"Oh, that was my field of study. I was an elementary teacher of music. My eight kids are all teachers, too, but not in music. Are you in band at school?"

"Yes, I play the tuba," Steve volunteered.

"Oh, that's nice," said Mrs. Jones. "I used to play the piano eight or nine hours a day, just for practice, but now I can't move as well, so I don't practice so much. People tell me I still play very well."

"Well, I have to be going," Steve answered. He could see she wanted someone to talk to, but he didn't have the time.

As he shut the door, he heard the creaking

(continued)

noise of Mrs. Jones' walker, and then the door bolt locked. A drop of cold water hit Steve's face as he was walking away from the house. It's too late to cut that lawn, he thought. At least tomorrow, he wouldn't have to work because it would be Sunday.

Life went on that way for Steve until his June graduation. Mrs. Jones' lawn was still his toughest lawn to cut. Besides the willow tree, Steve now had to contend with the neighbor's dog that apparently had been using her lawn as a restroom. The bees had also come back this summer to give Steve trouble. Everything was tolerable for Steve when he saw how much money he was making.

It was about midway through June when strange things started happening around Mrs. Jones' house. Steve noticed everytime he went there, pieces of furniture were missing. First the couch disappeared, and then two chairs. During July, Steve noticed that the dining room set had disappeared, and it was during the second week of August that he noticed the round table and the TV were gone.

All that remained were the pictures and her college degree on the walls, the piano, and a folding chair with an afghan over it by the window. Steve never asked what happened to the furniture; he didn't really care. He was young and was earning a lot of money, and what happened in Mrs. Jones' house wasn't any of his business. Steve had his own problem with getting ready for college in a couple of weeks. It was that final week before Steve had to leave for college when Mrs. Jones called him up.

"Steve," her voice was unsteady. "Steve, can you come over today?"

"Why? Your grass is all brown from the summer heat."

"I want you to cut it anyways," she answered back.

"Well, I really don't have the time, and I'm getting ready to leave for college," said Steve.

"Could you help me move the furniture around for cleaning then?"

"Mrs. Jones, you don't have any furniture left," replied Steve. "I really have to go. Bye."

"Steve," was all he heard as he hung up the phone. I don't want to cut her crummy lawn. What a hassle with all those twigs, the bees, and the dog next door. He dialed Melissa's number to ask her out. At least this way, Mrs. Jones couldn't call back.

About a week later, Steve went past her house and noticed a lot of cars out front and many with out-of-state license plates. Steve feared the worst as he approached the house. Suddenly, he got scared and ran off before he talked to anyone.

Steve read about Mrs. Jones' death in the paper that day. Her youngest daughter called him up that morning and told him that he needn't cut the grass anymore. Mrs. Jones had died and the house was for sale. The daughter told Steve that her mother had died of an overdose of sleeping pills, apparently an accident. Mrs. Jones had one possession left when she died, and that was the piano. She had left it to Steve.

As he was about to hang up the phone, Mrs. Jones' daughter asked a peculiar question "Did my mother have a cat? We found several cans of cat food in the cabinet, but we can't find the cat."

Steve slammed the phone down and thought that maybe next year he wouldn't raise his rates.

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Joliet Junior College